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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A PEOPLE IN TRANSITION:
LOCAL CONTROL COMES TO A RESERVE

by

DONALD S. TESSIER

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1991

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **A PEOPLE IN TRANSITION: LOCAL CONTROL COMES TO A RESERVE** submitted by **Donald S. Tessier** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF EDUCATION.**

K L Ward

Dr. K. L. Ward (Supervisor)

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Dr. L. S. Beauchamp (External Examiner)

Date: April 16, 1991

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Date: April 16, 1991

Abstract

Parents want and deserve input into their children's education. Without local control of education, this input does not exist for many native Canadians. The gaining of this self determination is a major development for a small community. This study's aim was to delve into this process. Study contributors represented the reserve's administrators, parents, educators, former students, elders, and members of the Department of Indian and Inuit Affairs. In depth reporting of their comments forms the bulk of the study.

Such a study is significant because many bands are currently assuming control of their educational programs. The intent was to provide insight into one community's problems and successes.

There is no attempt made to generalize the findings of this study. Some transferability is possible, but the reader must decide if this study is relevant to his or her circumstances. THe participants are a self limiting factor in this study. All successes are based on their openness, willingness to share, and their recollection abilities.

A review of the literature revealed a system of native education marked by high drop out and academic failure. Native groups appeared to view self determination as a remedy.

Study participants tended to share this outlook. Their role in the community had a profound bearing on their perceptions, however. Federal teachers felt threatened by local

control because of the potential loss of jobs. The politicians saw local control as a source of revenue and employment, while parents and former students hoped for more say in the school and more relevant curriculum. The study revealed much dissatisfaction with the current education system, a fear of inadequate funding, and a definite feeling of empowerment in shaping their children's educational destinies.

Major findings of this study included the realization that the process of assuming local control was not to be rushed. This particular band found themselves forced into a "hurried" situation which is not advisable. Recommendations to other communities considering local control are also made.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated

to the loving memory of

Serge W. Tessier

my father

for all that he gave to each and every one of us

d. tessier

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 1
Introducing the Study 1
Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study 3
Research Questions 4
Significance Statement 5
Basic Assumptions 5
Delimitations 6
Limitations 6
Definition of Terms 6
BCR 6
Indian 7
Local Control 7
Reserve 7
Social Promotion 7
Organization of the Study 7
Chapter 2 9
Review of the Related Literature 9
The State of Native Education 9
Early Attempts at Local Control 12
The 70's 14
The1980's 15
Events in the North 16
Events in Western Canada 18
Can Local Control Solve the Problem? 20
Summary 21
Conceptual Framework 22
Chapter 3 25
Methodology 25
Introduction 25
Ethical Considerations 25
Research Design 26
Preliminary Study 27
Main Study 27
Data Collection 30
Data Analysis 31
Credibility of Data 32
Summary 33
Chapter 4 34
Data Synthesis 34
Introduction 34
Background 34
Development of Local Control on the Ish-Nish Reserve 36
Problems with the Old School - a 2nd Class Program & Building 38

Lack of Student Preparation for life off the reserve 40
Enrollment 41
Devolution - The Pressures To Go 'Local' 41
The Education Development Committee (EDC) 42
Selection of Members to the EDC 43
The EDC - its Authority and Decision Making Process 43
The EDC's Preparation for Take Over 44
EDC - Their Findings 44
EDC - The Problems 45
Perceptions of Local Control 46
A Band Perspective of Local Control 47
Local Control - "What Exactly Is It?" 47
Local Control - School can be Relevant 47
Local Control - a Boon to the Community 48
Local Control - a Political Issue 49
A Civil Service Perspective 50
Local Control - Will it Improve the School? 52
"This is our School" and that's Dignity 53
"Saving our language" 53
Other Benefits 54
"Is the Band Ready?" 57
"We Don't Have the Expertise Yet" 57
"Their Forcing Local Control on Us" 59
"What's Been Done?" 59
Funding 60
Treaty Rights 61
"Will the School Get Used?" 62
A Commitment Needed for Community Involvement 63
Justifications for Potential Band Success 65
"The Locally Controlled School ... [A] World of Potential" 65
The Curriculum
Native Culture versus Academics 66
"Native Culture Should Be # 1" 66
"Provincial Curriculum Should be Priority" 67
Culturally Enriched Provincial Curriculum 67
"...A Complete Program that Prepares Kid's For Life ..." 68
Who Should do the Teaching? 70
What Could Go Wrong? 71
"Results Could be Second Rate" 71
"Funding may be Inadequate" 72
"Parents might not send their kids" 72
"Interests and education of the children will become secondary over the interests of the bureaucrats" 72
Aboriginal Treaty Rights 73
What Would be the Results of Success? 74
Summary 75
Chapter 5 76
Reflections, Analysis, and Recommendations 76
Reflections and Analysis of the Emergent Themes 76
The Reserve School was a poor School 78

No choice 78
So Much to do 79
Local Control = Self Government 80
Local Control = Dignity 81
Local Control = Quality Education 81
Local Control = A Feeling of Family 82
Local Control = Total Native Involvement 82
Funding 82
"... No Politicking." 84
"Local Control Gives Us Power" 86
Summary 86
Recommendations 88
Recommendations for Further Study 90
Conclusions 90
Reference List 92
Appendices 96
Appendix A Correspondence 97
Appendix B Sample Interview Questions 103

Chapter 1

Introducing the Study

Control. Two syllables which comprise a 7 letter word. Being *in* control allows a man to be in charge of his destiny. If he does not have this power, he must rely upon others for his very existence.

Today, many native bands exercise some degree of control in their lives. Frequently, education is not one of the domains of this self determination. In 1986, almost eighty percent (Barman, 1986) of native children in Canada received their education from an authority not centered in the community in which they lived. Most native children were either attending federally operated schools (28.3%), or attending off reserve schools within the provincial school systems (48.9%). At the beginning of the 1990 school year, almost eighty five percent of the bands in Alberta had taken charge of their schools. This is a radical change.

The dominant Canadian society views education as an inalienable right, taken for granted. The majority of our aboriginal peoples still do not have an educational system that they can truly call their own. Various government bureaucracies tend to fight over their respective jurisdictions within the educational field. Some Native Bands have used education, and its respective funding, as a bargaining chip in their negotiations with the federal government. Native parents are strangers in their children's education.

The National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations), is an organization representing all native people in Canada. In August 1972, they introduced a

document entitled Indian Control Of Indian Education. This paper reaffirmed natives' interest in transferring, from the Federal Government, the authority and funds to carry out all aspects of schooling for their children.

> At the current time, this legal responsibility for native education lies with the Federal Government as defined by treaty and the Indian Act. Any transfer of authority must come from the Federal Government to the Indian bands.
>
> The native people of Canada have asked that the basic fundamental aspects of native attitudes, values and culture be provided for in education. Books do not contain these values. They are Indian history, legends and culture. When native children come to school for the first time, they have inherent social consciousness, as do all children. Native children value self reliance, and generosity. They have respect for personal freedom, and nature. In schools (whose authority lies outside their control) native children have little opportunity to establish a value system which is compatible with their own.
>
> If we are to avoid the conflict of values which has led to withdrawal and failure, Indian parents must have control of education with the inherent responsibility of setting goals.
>
> ... We must, therefore, reclaim our right to direct the education of our children. Based on two education principles recognized in Canadian society: Parental Responsibility and Local Control of Education ..." (p. 4)
>
> The practice of utilizing local school committees as an advisory body having limited influence must be replaced giving way to a functional, effective, decision making body. The roles of the band councils and this educational authority would be decided and defined by the various bands (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 8).

The NIB feels that native children can only succeed in the educational process if it is relevant to them. Their children can succeed. They feel that they require input into what happens in the system. They feel that this is only possible if they control it. This local authority would be responsible for:

> -budgeting, spending and establishing priorities,
> -determining the types of school facilities required to meet local needs: e.g. day school, residence, group homes, nursery, kindergarten, high school.
> -directing staff hiring and curriculum development with special concern for Indian languages and culture,

-administering the physical plant,
-developing adult education and upgrading courses,
-negotiating agreements with provincial or separate school jurisdictions for the kind of services necessary for local requirements,
-co-operating and evaluation of education programs both on and off the reserve,
-providing counselling services. (p. 8)

The NIB called for native people trained as teachers on those reserves expressing interest in local control of education. Another interesting point that they raised was that there should be "adequate representation" of natives on those school boards charged with the responsibility of educating native students (p. 9). This practice would ensure parental participation in the education of their children even off the reserve.

The desire is to participate more actively in their children's education. With the publishing of this document, many bands started to press for local control of education in their communities. Until the circulation of this paper, there was basically silence regarding the devastating results frequently produced by the white man's education system. Change in the educational destinies of their children was now possible. Many Indian leaders saw the long awaited 'local control of education' as the solution to their problems.

Problem Statement and Purpose of the Study

Many native bands across Canada have assumed control over their own educational programs. As any review of the literature suggests, there is a need for native self determination and autonomy in matters pertaining to the education of their youth. Few studies, if any, have actually concentrated on a band assuming control of its schools. How does an Indian band decide to take over control of their educational program? What do the parents really think about localized control of their educational program? Will it enhance their children's opportunity to succeed in school or further their educational aspirations?

What do the leaders of the community think about local control? What is it like to assume local control? Will the actual process work according to plan? What goes well, and what goes wrong? Is local control the solution to an educational system that has failed its clients?

These questions and their answers will be the driving force behind this study. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the achievement of local control. The study provides community perceptions before the event, as well as observations of the events leading to the physical transfer of power.

Research Questions

The outline of the specific research questions which guide the study follows.

(1) What do the community leaders think about local control of their own educational programs?

(2) What do the parents and students think about local control of their own educational programs?

(3) How does the current administration (Department of Indian Affairs) respond to these perceptions of the stakeholders?

(4) What problems exist currently and in gaining the authority to run the school?

(5) Is the community and the government ready for this change of authority to occur?

Significance Statement

Many reserve communities are thinking of assuming control of their educational programs. This study will provide insight into one community's thoughts, successes, and problems as they attempt to tackle this issue. By having access to this information, others should be able to draw parallels, and gain from this data. Potentially, the government agencies involved might get a new perspective to this process as well.

It would appear that no previous study attempted to gather the feelings of the stakeholders before the assumption local control, nor followed them through the process. Therefore the study is import and relevant.

Basic Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, assumptions are:

- the sample of people chosen for study is a representative grouping of people from the community, and not representative of extremist views.

-people are truthful when asked questions about their thoughts and feelings concerning local control.

-people are willing to share their true thoughts with a researcher.

-people feel free, when promised anonymity, to discuss their true thoughts, without fear of reprisal.

-people can accurately recall information.

Delimitations

The study confines itself to the people spoken to, and there is no attempt to generalize the findings of the study. The researcher believes that some degree of transferability is possible under certain circumstances. These circumstances can only exist based on a description of the context. The reader must assume all responsibility for ascertaining the context, time, and transferability.

Limitations

(1) The respondent's recall of events and circumstances about which they talk limits the study.

(2) The researcher's skill in getting the respondents to recall facts and to elicit feelings about what local control is, and how it's going to affect their lives, limits the study.

(3) The maintenance of complete anonymity sometimes limited what was reportable of respondent's comments. Frequently, an extremely interesting comment could not be utilized without exposing the source, as limited numbers of people would be privy to the information disclosed.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions of terms will apply.

BCR - Band Council Resolution. When the chief and council of a community arrive at a decision regarding something which they deem important, they may issue a BCR regarding it. It is a physical document which is enforceable.

Indian - An Indian person is any individual who designated as a Treaty Indian, as described by treaty and the appropriate acts of the Canadian Government.

Local Control - Local Control is the ability of parents to influence and to determine outcomes in the classroom. Parents, thus, have control over hiring, curriculum, and learning activities. Parents may act on their own behalf, or through others in the community who represent them. (Assheton-Smith, 1977) Such authority does not relieve the Federal Government of their obligations in providing education to Treaty Indians who live on reserves in Canada. This definition serves for the purposes of this study.

Reserve - A reserve is the land tract, designated by the Federal Government, to Indian people in Canada, as their tribal homeland.

Social Promotion - A practice all too frequently employed in Native schools. If a child simply gets too old for a specific grade, he or she is promoted to the next grade.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides a basic introduction to the study. Included in this section are the problem statement, as well as the purpose and limitations of the study. It basically sets the stage for the inquiry.

A review of the related literature is presented in Chapter 2. The conceptual framework of the study is also outlined.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology employed, and the ethical considerations of this study. The data retrieved from the interviews are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the emergent themes and the data, as well as insight into what actually happened during the final days of the Task Force. These observations demonstrate some of the problems that were encountered up to the actual signing of the local control agreement. It also contains a summary of the findings of the study. In conclusion, some recommendations for other bands considering local control, or those who have recently taken on this responsibility, are also provided.

Chapter 2

Review of the Related Literature

> A drop out rate of four times the national average (96% of Indian children never finished high school);
>
> A related unemployment rate averaging 50% for adult males, going as high as 90% in some communities;
>
> "Inaccuracies and omissions" relating to the Indian contribution to Canadian history in texts used in federal and provincial schools.
>
> An age-grade retardation rooted in language conflict and early disadvantage, which accelerates as the child progresses through the primary and elementary grades;
>
> Less than 15% of the teachers had specialized training in cross-cultural education and less than 10% had any knowledge of Indian language;
>
> The majority of Indian parents were uninformed about the implication of decisions made to transfer children from reserve schools to provincial schools. (pages 3-4)

Verna Kirkness (1985) cited these findings from a 1971 Federal Standing Committee on Indian Affairs report. Attempts at native education have failed. There is a need for change. The available literature is replete with research studies (Richardson & Richardson, 1984), (Bradley, 1983), (Dupree, 1980), (Kunkel, 1982), (Kyritz, 1984), (Pauls, 1984), and (Yuzdepski, 1983) indicating this. Woloshyn (1984) and Melcosky's (1985) articles are examples of suggestions for alternative schooling to stop the tail-spin in native education.

The State of Native Education

For centuries, Indian people have given high priority to the education of their youth (Kunkel 1982). Inextricably bound up with traditional Indian culture were the much valued duties of the raising of a family, and the preparation of children for adulthood. Much has

been written about the elaborate rituals, ceremonies, customs, values and rich traditions of the Indian people prior to contact with the white man. During these times, control of education rested with family members, elders, and the extended family.

The Europeans, missionaries, and eventually the federal government arrived on the scene, with their notions of assimilation (Titley, 1981). Much of the aboriginal people's traditional way of life underwent dramatic change. Since then, several generations of Indian people have lost their ancestral connection with their roots. The most basic, fundamental right of raising one's children had disappeared, and, for all purposes, was lost forever.

The plight of natives within the educational system has been the subject of many studies. Early studies (Edington, 1969), (Kutsche, 1964), (Meyer, 1972), and (Berger, 1973), focused on the high drop out rate, the academic failure, and how the educational system has been a dismal, catastrophic failure for natives in North America.

One might well ask, "What is wrong with the current educational system?" One of the explanations cited most frequently in the literature is curriculum. Curriculum materials do not meet the needs of the Indian children because they are not relevant. Natives are traditionally shown in a negative light. Curriculum materials do not speak of native accomplishments, history, or philosophy. (Richardson & Richardson, 1984)

There is more to curricular control than the type of material implemented. Couture (1974) states that the "Indian student [must] become grounded in the values and language of his culture." It involves the provision for language instruction in the community's

mother tongue. This is only accomplished via the hiring of local elders, and interested parents as classroom teacher aides to assist with the instruction of the children. The inclusion of elders and parents into the program adds a certain vitality, not to mention the impact of having the 'important others' involved as role models for the children. This notion entrenches language and cultural tradition, as no other aspect of schooling can.

The available literature is full of language of instruction debate. Many of the native organizations have cried for emphasis on native languages. The school system has tended to take the opposing faction and offer instruction only in English. Some sort of compromise position is necessary. As Hawthorne (1967) maintains "... the young Indian can acquire various of the white's values and modes of behavior with no weakening of his ethnic identity." (p. 23) This has not been the standard approach in native education. "Whereas the English speaking student learning French is secure with himself and his culture ... the native student learning English is totally denied his first language and culture." (Weber, 1975)

The student who has been raised speaking his native tongue should be " ... taught in this language ... [and] ... he should immediately begin work on an intensive ESL (English as a Second Language) program." (Parker, 1975, p. 68) If we exclusively continue to use English in the native classroom, we are showing the child that we feel that his native tongue is inferior. (Weber, 1975)

Richardson and Richardson (1986) state that the lack of Indian parental involvement in the existing system is a major contributor to failure. There is no chain of command to which the parents may relate. They cannot participate in a school board, because there isn't

one. Parents need to be involved. "Parent involvement provides the foundations for any community institution." (p.21) A program officer with the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, tells of the Enoch school which, as of 1984, had not yet employed a native teacher, nor administrator. (Pauls, 1984)

Until the early 80's, native students received a "white man's education." Under Section 91 of the British North America Act, Treaty Number 6, the Federal Government promised the Canadian Indian that it would provide educational services on the reserves. The first specific Indian education legislation passed in 1868. This legislation separated the "advanced" bands from the "not advanced bands." Those bands considered advanced were given token decision-making powers. (Barman et al, p. 32)

> ... [T]hey have not asked for education that will turn their children into white men, but an education to give them the tool to survive in the white man's world. (Studebaker, 1977)

Early Attempts at Local Control

During the late 1960's, and early 1970's some communities in the United States had begun contracting their right to control their own schools. (Cooper & Gregory, 1976). The Blackwater Community School and the Gila River Indian Community School near Phoenix, Arizona, are two examples. The United States government was busy during this era, and the effort culminated in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975. This act enabled "American Indian communities to assume their rightful role in control of their own life-styles" (p. 8).

Many early educational researchers, (Bryde, 1969), (Hobart, 1968), and (Fearn, 1967), supported the value of Indian parents having control over the education of their children. They suggested that the parents should be allowed to set their own educational goals that are in unison with their cultural needs and those of the dominant society. Although it is difficult to pin point exactly when the first models of Indian control over Indian education came into being, the innovations at Rough Rock began to appear in the literature (Erickson, 1970), (Johnson, 1968). Rough Rock is a Navajo reservation in Arizona. The parents stated "We want our children to be proud of being Navahos. We want them to know who they are?" (Fuchs, 1967, p.82). Fuchs explored the issue, "Can ... a relatively uneducated, unsophisticated poverty group successfully assume control over the formal education of their children ...?" (p. 82). Rough Rock has proven to be an example for many native groups across North America of what they can do to help themselves. Platero (1970) writes about the Navajo efforts:

> Rough Rock Demonstration School ... is predicated upon the assumption that ... Indian people are capable of assuming responsibility for the operation of educational institutions serving their children ... Indian people will involve themselves deeply in the education of their children if they are given an opportunity to do so in a meaningful fashion (that is, if actual decision-making powers can ever be wrenched loose from the well-intentioned but often ill-informed people who, hitherto, have made Indian education their own particular province). (p.57)

The concepts employed at Rough Rock were daring and different. Biglin and Wilson (1972) surveyed the parents to discover what they rated as most important in the school programming. The parents felt that teachers were the single most important factor in a successful school program. They felt that it was a "desired quality" for them to be fluent in the native language. They wanted the history of the community be taught in their school.

The 70's

Discontent was growing in Canada. By the early 1970's, a number of native bands pressed for more and more input into their children's education. The Federal Government issued its White Paper on Indian policy in 1969. This paper was viewed as an attempt, on the part of the government, to divest itself of the Indian problem by transferring Indian education to the provinces.

Native leaders issued, in retaliation, the "Red Paper" (officially known as Indian Control Of Indian Education), in 1972. In this paper, Canada's native population rejected the Federal Governments position. They felt that their input in the educational system should be developed under the rights guaranteed to them by the treaties, and not under provincial jurisdiction.

Two local control projects appeared in Canada during this time period. The Dogrib Indians from Rae-Edzo in the Northwest Territories, used the Rough Rock initiative as a model, and assumed control over the Rae-Edzo schools in 1971 (Carney, 1978). A small Alberta community, Blue Quills, (Bryce & McIntosh, 1970) also sought to operate their own school.

The literature of the time espoused the benefits of local control. Self government became a 'catch-all' phase (Assheton-Smith, 1977) (Urion, 1974), becoming different things to different groups of people. Many saw the advantages of local control for native peoples. There are potential problems, however, (Pauls, 1984) with band control. The current Federal Government Tuition Agreements are locked in with Provincial Boards. There is no national policy which provides training to those bands who wish to manage

their own schools. Federal funding to local band authorities is viewed as inadequate. The situation is not very favorable to current school staff, and this can cause some major problems.

Is local band control the best solution to the perceived problems in native education? Kleinfeld (1972) asks, "What are the conditions under which Indian school boards succeed in improving Indian education and what are the conditions under which they do not?" (p. 7). He describes specific examples which he feels demonstrate why regional, rather than local community control, might produce superior results. In the Alaskan communities which he considered, he found that there was a lack of local expertise in matters of educational planning, and lack of political expertise to introduce educational reform.

The mid seventies saw increased lobbying for local control in Canada. The National Indian Brotherhood also pressured the government for the establishment of native teacher training programs. Several native teacher education programs were established, such as UBC's Native Indian Teacher Education Program, Simon Fraser University - Mt. Currie's Native Teacher Education Program, Brandon University's Native Teacher Education Program, and the University of Alberta's Morning Star Program. The purpose of these programs was to meet the expected demand for native teachers in reserve schools.

The1980's

The Alberta Department of Education published a report in 1984 entitled "Native Education in Alberta: Committee on Tolerance and Understanding Discussion Paper #2." It was the second of four discussion papers. The committee's purpose with this paper was to

inform Albertan's regarding the general state of the province's Native education programs. This was a very detailed report; probably the most intensive analysis ever done of Native students in this province. The primary conclusion reached was that "the general state of Native education in Alberta is deplorable." (preamble, page 1)

The eighties showed continued interest, amongst the native population in Canada, towards the establishment of local school authorities (Isherwood et al, 1986), (Kyritz, 1984), (Titley, 1981), (Blinkhorn, 1981), and (Cummins, 1985). Local school boards were being viewed as the only viable alternative to preserve local culture, history, language and lifestyle.

Events in the North

Isherwood, Sorensen, and Colbourne, in their 1986 article "Educational Development in the North: Preparing Inuit Leaders for School Board Control", speak of the Inuit's desire and determination "to control the institutions that affect their lives. . ." (p. 9) A Baffin Regional Education Society was established in 1979. The society trained local Inuit leaders in dealing with educational issues to prepare them for eventual take over of their schools. The ultimate goal in the training program "was not to tell the Inuit how to form and operate a school board, but rather to get them to discuss how they wanted the board to function" (p. 10). The Inuit received professional development for their new roles.

McBeath, Kleinfeld, McDiarmid, Coon and Shepro studied rural Alaskan schools. They found that, as of 1984, all of Alaska's rural schools were locally controlled. The

decentralization process had started in 1975, after political pressure from the communities. Based on their research, they suggest that, for local control to be successful, the following criteria seemed to be important:

> a stable local administrator who shares influence with the school board, has a positive orientation toward the local community, and a respect for community values;
>
> local boards or committees that represent major community interests, including factions;
>
> stability (low turnover) on the local board;
>
> a district superintendent who personally supports the ideology of local control;
>
> district policy specifying substantive, functional areas of school government in which local boards and administrators have deciding influence;
>
> district-level communication processes that are open. (p.4)

McBeath et al noted that the changeover from central control was not without problems. One of the biggest was the ambiguous objectives,, at all levels, for local control. They also found that the bands had not allowed a sufficient time frame, for success. Another source of potential difficulties occurred in communities where the local citizens were not adequately involved in the design and implementation of the system.

They felt that many of the obstacles encountered could have been prevented if the local communities had been provided more training. The local boards made mistakes during their first tenures due to the lack of training. There was also no evaluation system in place to determine whether or not the efforts were successful.

According to the authors, the decentralization process proved successful over the three years that they studied it. The new locally controlled schools were found to have

much lower absenteeism rates, and a more positive school climate than were previously observed. Parents surveyed during this study had a much more positive attitude towards the school staff and the way in which the schools were handling the curricular implementation of native language and culture. The teachers, on the other hand, seemed to be less positive about the school since it was localized. They felt that the student achievement was not as high as it could be, since the decentralization. The basis of these thoughts was not expounded in the article.

Events in Western Canada

Gardner (1986) studied a band controlled school in British Columbia - The Seabird Island Community School. This school was established in 1978, in response to parental desire to make education relevant to the needs of their children. Some of the new and unique features established in this school include:

1. a philosophy, goals and objectives based on Indian values;
2. providing a context in which students can develop a strong sense of identity;
3. choosing among many options and alternatives in curriculum planning and implementation; and
4. linking the community and school closer together. (p. 16)

Community members are very involved in the school. The students appear to maintain a strong sense of Indian identity. The cultural dimensions of the community have been positively intertwined with the necessary academic skills. When the article was written, the school had been successfully in operation for eight years.

Many communities have viewed local control as the answer to an educational system that they viewed as a failure. One such group was the Norway House Band, in

Manitoba. Riffel and Sealey (1988) wrote about this band's unanimous 1988 vote to go local in terms of their education system. An educational evaluation was prepared in 1987 for this band. It described an educational system fraught with

> levels of achievement that are lower than they should be, drop-out rates are high and students are not interested in their own education. There is a crisis of confidence in the current educational system. The majority of high school students in the community feel that the total program is of poor quality. Two thirds of the adults in the community give the system ratings of fair, poor and very poor, and that one-third of the adults in the community believe that the system is worse than it was five years ago. (p.7)

Riffel and Sealey determined that social promotion was one of the biggest faults within the system. Age-Grade placement problems due to social promotions (about 30%) ensure that students are not adequately "prepared for success in their grades" (p. 10). This situation can only lead to further problems in later years. This was well evidenced in Norway House where provincial assessment test results show achievement far below the provincial average. Riffel and Sealey conclude that academic failure had accumulated over the years.

> Some academic problems, such as low reading ability, may have begun as early as Grade One, with children experiencing less than a year's growth but being promoted anyway; in extreme cases the cumulative result could be some students entering Grade Nine or Ten without being able to read the textbooks (p. 13)

There is no guarantee, however, that local control will solve these problems. Some schools that have attempted take over have experienced difficulties. Fairford, Manitoba was encountering problems after taking control of its schools. Sealey and Riffel (1986) also studied this school.

> Unfortunately, local control has not been easy for the people of Fairford. Many problems have occurred recently: budgets have been overspent; money has been spent unwisely; vandalism has become a problem; there is a shortage of textbooks

> and of classroom and maintenance supplies; some staff were dismissed by the community; ... (p. 6)

After intensive study, four major recommendations were made to the Fairford community. They felt that the community must become much more involved within the school and within the educational authority. They stress that it is not simply the parents that must get involved, but the students as well. The students must bring their share of responsibility into the education system, expecting excellence of the school, and of themselves. The organizational structures of the school had to be reinforced, according to this study. Support services for remedial and counseling student services had to be put in place. (p. 1)

Can Local Control Solve the Problem?

Much of the available literature would seem to indicate that local control is a solution (Kyritz, 1984), (Titley, 1981), (Yuzdepski, 1983), (Blinkhorn, 1981), and (Cummins, 1985). Many have spoken in words that are full of hope. "Give us the money and we'll do better" seems to be the battle cry of many of the position papers and reports issued by native organizations during the seventies and eighties. Little appears available to indicate just how the bands would use the money, or if they would, indeed, do a better job.

Kirkness (1985), while advocating native self government, indicates that there are potential pitfalls. Without a clear "... definition of control and secondly, a clear implementation plan" (p. 5) such efforts are potentially doomed to failure.

She adheres to the position that the Federal Government has both the legal and financial responsibility to provide education for all status Indian people in Canada, both on and off the reserve. She writes that:

> Control means that the Federal Government must transfer to local Bands the authority for the funds which are allotted for Indian education (Indian Control of Indian Education, p.6)
>
> Band Councils, in turn, designate Education authorities with set terms of reference to implement local control of education.
>
> Control means that Indian people either directly or through their respective bands and organizations will participate fully in the design and implementation of the education of their members.
>
> Control within the policy includes Indian authority for establishing priorities, preparing budgets, hiring staff, and developing curriculum. However, the difference in perception of control by D.I.A. was evident soon after the policy was established. Herein lies the problem. (p.5)

Indian bands, according to Kirkness, "were permitted involvement but not control" (p.5). Indian controlled schools came to known as Band-operated schools. She states that there is a difference between the terms 'control' and 'operate'.

The terms of reference must be determined, and the bands must have definitive plans of action. Without these well thought out plans, they are certain to have organizational and funding problems.

Summary

Any research conducted in the area of local control will turn up massive amounts of material indicating that there are definite problems within the area of Native education. It is even possible to find evaluations of some Canadian schools that have gone local; both successfully, and not so successfully. What the literature does not contain are references as to what it is like to assume control of a reserve school. No one appears to have gone to the

parents and other community members to find out why they think that local control might improve the educational system, if, indeed, they do. Further study into this area is indicated.

Conceptual Framework

Native education in Canada has been blatantly unsuccessful. Native Canadians, therefore, have pressured the Federal Government to improve the situation. The literature reveals that many researchers feel that local control is the answer. Figure 1 depicts the inter-relationships involved in local control. While local control is the guiding force, students are central to all activities regarding education. The band wishes to be in charge. The Federal Government must transfer authority to the bands, so that they form a provincial authority school board. The band must, necessarily, work within the guidelines and parameters established by the provincial education authority. They are directly accountable to the parents, whose concern is that their children receive the best possible education. They hold the band accountable should the system fail. Their first line of defense is the teachers, who, in the local control scenario, are employed directly by the band. The staff are, thus, responsible to the parents, the children, the band, and the provincial authority. They must ensure that they are providing the method of instruction and materials that reflect the needs of their students. They must also be certain that the provincial curriculum is being implemented. They are directly accountable to the band and the parents. The provincial authority must ensure that the basic right of educational opportunity for all is being provided in the best means possible. It is a tangled web of interwoven responsibility. The system collapses if one factor is unfulfilled.

Native organizations and others have viewed local control as the answer to the problems facing educators and native students in Canada. Have they considered the relationships that must function for local control to succeed? Do community members share this hope and expectation for local control? Do they even know, exactly, what it is and what it involves.

Conceptual Framework

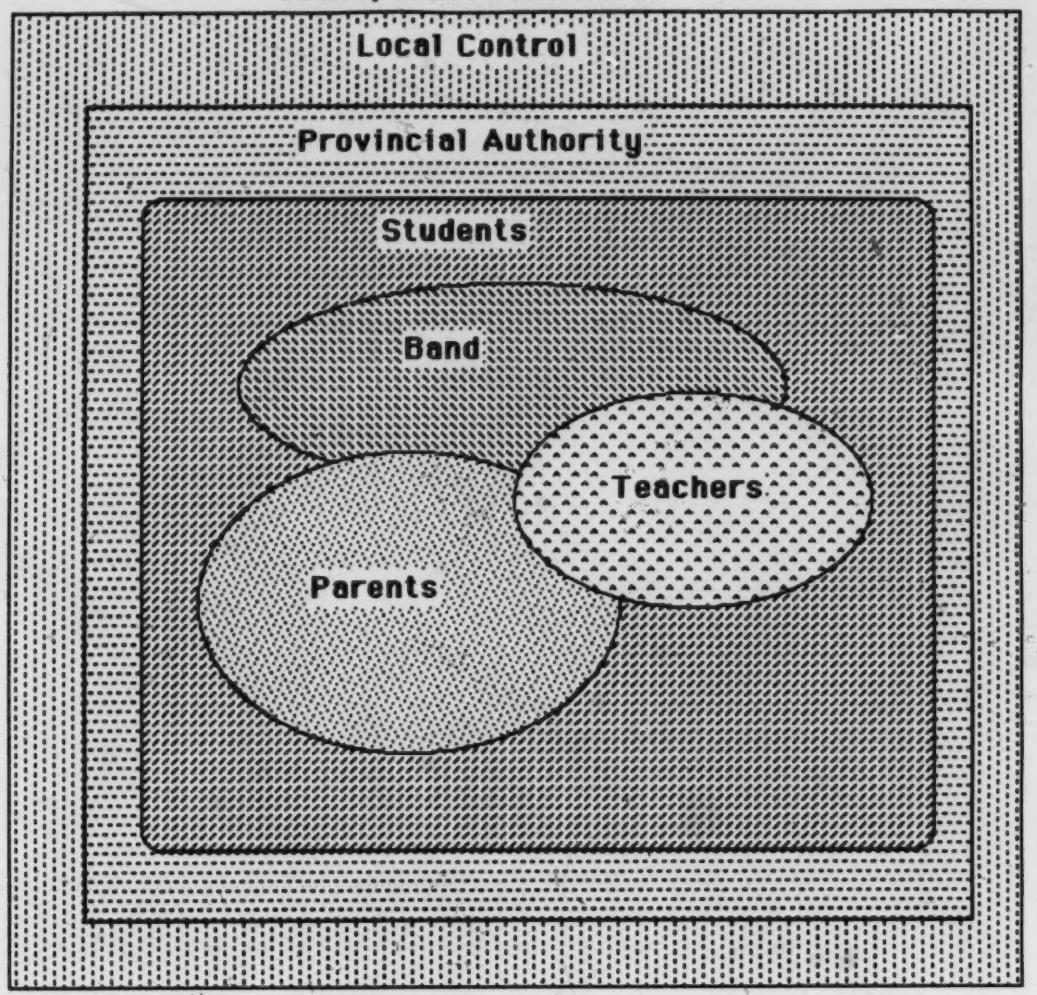

Figure 1

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

In this study, I researched one community's perceptions of local control. My purpose was to gain insight into the achievement of local control. The methodology selected bore this in mind.

This chapter provides a description of the methodology used to conduct the study. The first section provides a brief discussion of the ethical considerations and precautions employed in this research. The research design is then discussed, followed by a description of my pilot study. I also discuss the main study, and my methods employed regarding the data acquired.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount during this study. The study deals with a small community, where everyone knows everyone else. The study participants were frequently very conscious of their roles within the community structure. It is one thing to have an opinion, and quite another to feel free to express it without fear of reprisal. Very clearly defined ethical principles guided me as a researcher, as developed and discussed in depth with the University of Alberta Ethics Committee.

Before an informant gave consent for participation, I informed them of the purpose and the methodology of the study. I informed them that they could opt out of the study at

any time. All informants received assurance that their identities would remain confidential, and that any identifying information that they might provide would be omitted from the transcripts before they were used. No one but myself would see the raw transcripts. The generically identified transcripts were available only to select colleagues to ensure this confidentiality.

The generic name of Ish-Nish replaced the real community name. The native language of the community was deleted in all quoted passages. The genders of the informants were removed, where appropriate, to protect participant identities. After transcription from tape, all participants had an opportunity to read the transcripts and to delete certain parts of their interviews if they wished.

Establishing a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participants was essential for honest and open dialogue. I had an advantage with this study, as I had known my informants previously. Establishing an easy rapport and open relationship was much easier due to my prior experiences in the community. All informants were more comfortable due to my complete disclosure of exactly what would happen with the information. The study participants came to trust and to confide in me. I believe that I earned and established a trusting relationship with all study collaborators.

Research Design

Qualitative methods permit the researcher to get at the personal experiences of the participants. The process of assuming local control over the educational program on an Indian reserve is a very people oriented experience. It reveals itself more clearly, through

qualitative methods. The aim of this study is to understand the informant's views on education and local control for the Ish-Nish School. I chose to use qualitative methods to achieve this aim.

Owens (1982) described qualitative research as seeking "to understand human behavior from the actor's own frame of reference" (p. 7). The aim is to discover the ways in which different people make sense out of their world. In this sense, "qualitative ... descriptions enable the investigator to see the 'real' world as those under study see it" (p.7). Twelve interview subjects participated so as to acquire a deeper understanding of the changes occurring in Ish-Nish. Basically, the twelve were chosen on the basis of their willingness to participate, and their position within the community. I chose two people from each of the potential interview groups I had previously constructed; teachers, parents, elders, former students, members of the community council, and head office personnel from DIA. Owens points out that naturalistic inquiry is based on two concepts. Human behavior is understandable in its contextual terms, and that one cannot understand human behavior without understanding the participant's frame of reference for interpreting their environment (p. 5). This study attempts to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of how the residents of the Ish-Nish community view the advent of local control. The study treats the meanings of the informants as being very important.

Preliminary Study

The Department of Indian and Inuit Affairs gave verbal consent for me to talk to the federal teachers in October 1988. The Ish-Nish Chief and council gave written permission to do the study in November of 1988. In March of 1989, I conducted a "make contact"

study within the community, for a course that I was taking. A conceptual framework, questionnaire, and interview questions were developed based on what the literature said about local control, and the general state of Native education in Canada. During the course of this preliminary study, I allowed the participants to volunteer their services for interviews. Initially, I chose one person from four different classifications of community members. I contacted these four individuals, and arrangements were made to meet.

I spent a great deal of time discussing the ethical considerations with them. Based on their agreement to proceed (one withdrew from participation at this point), I either scheduled a preliminary interview, or thanked them and left. The questions asked were general, and open ended. There were various reasons for this approach. Consensus around the community was that very few people knew much about local control, or that the band intended to implement it. The open ended, general questioning, was to provide insight without a priori assumptions being imposed on this first session.

The preliminary study proved very helpful. It allowed for the testing of the methodology employed. Refinement and general appraisal of the interview questions were also possible as a result. In general, this mini appraisal brought forward the design of the study, and demonstrated topics for further investigation within the main study. The researcher honed his interviewing skills, re-established himself in the field of study, and generally become more knowledgeable about the local control process.

Main Study

After the analysis of the data gathered in the pilot study, I further refined the interview questions. I categorized my potential participants as to their role within the community. The categories that I used were:

a) local government officials

b) educators

c) federal employees

d) parents

e) former students who had dropped out and quit school; and

f) community elders.

Due to the willingness of community members to participate, it was not too difficult to find representatives for each of these categories.

I sent a letter to nine of these respondents and followed up with a phone call to all twelve people that I hoped to involve in the study. The letter outlined, once again, the purpose of the study, and the time commitments required for interviewing. The letter indicated that the interviews would be taped. It also indicated that they could, at any time, opt out of the study if they wished (see Appendix A). I verbally advised the participants of their opportunity to read the transcripts of the interviews and make changes in its content if they so desired. I informed participants that I would be seeking their permission to use specific quotations in the study. All informants were assured that information was confidential, and that their identification would be impossible. I arranged either a preliminary, or second interview with these people.

Ethical considerations were discussed, and the interviews were conducted in March 1989. Open ended questions were used (see appendix) so that I could probe for more information, as appropriate. This technique seemed to be most suitable, as it allowed the informants to talk at length, thereby providing greater insight as to their perceptions.

All was going well, then the Band totally shelved the idea of local control. The situation remained static for almost thirteen months. The Department of Indian Affairs started pressuring the band to take over control at that time, and the idea was reborn. I found myself on the Task Force which had the responsibility of investigating this endeavor. The duties created by my position left time at a premium, but I was able to continue with the study at that point. I found myself in a unique position. The Federal Government paid my salary, but, I was now working, officially, for the Band. I was privy to information that was unusable in the study. If I felt that the government was doing something improperly, my reactions required moderation as they were paying my salary. I was privy to band decision processes that were, of course, private. It was under these circumstances that I continued with the interview process, in the spring of 1990.

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted in the school, in the band office, at the Edmonton Department of Indian Affairs, and in people's homes in the community. Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted over a period of five months. Interviewees had a follow-up session during which they read their interview transcripts. In some cases, I sought further clarification of ideas that they had expressed. In others, follow-up provided them with an opportunity to delete sections of the interview, if they so wished.

Although the core interview questions remained the same, additional areas for discussion emerged during the interview process. All interviews were tape-recorded, which allowed for more complete analysis of all the data.

I maintained a log of notes during each interview. This practice of note-taking is supported by Bogdan and Biklen (1982), and Owens (1982). These notes better facilitated the interviewer's ability to draw out the thoughts of the participants. This practice of field note taking helped to guide the study, raise new interview questions, and provided me with an opportunity to pursue specific ideas.

Data Analysis

Transcription took place shortly after the completion of each taped interview. This practice allowed me the opportunity to analyze each interview before the next conference. Transcription was the first step in the analysis process. I made additional notes during and after this procedure. These notations identified areas that required further clarification, and potential themes. Questions were noted for subsequent interviews, and I was afforded the opportunity to reflect on the data.

The most intense analysis took place once all the information was collected, transcribed, and printed. I reread each interview. Potential categories and possible themes were written in the margins. Blocks of text deemed to be especially powerful or important were identified with felt pen. This process assisted me in identifying quotations that might be used later in the reporting of the data.

Credibility of Data

Throughout the study, specific methods were employed to ensure data trustworthiness. During the collection of the data, I was able to make use of categories and themes that emerged during the initial pilot study and expand on these in subsequent interviews. Informants provided their perceptions of what local control meant to them, and its importance to the band membership. Once the interviews were transcribed, studied and analyzed, a copy of the interview was delivered to each informant where I raised clarification issues. Participants had an opportunity to verify and clarify data. (See appendix for correspondence covering this topic.) These procedures provided credibility. Guba and Lincoln (1982) state that it is incumbent upon the researcher to find out if the inquirer's analysis of the data is believable. This, I accomplished, by going back to the data sources. Through these member checks, I ensured that the interpretations and data were sound and accurately reflected the participants' perceptions.

After the first draft of Chapter 4, member checks were also conducted with selected peers. The research findings were shared with colleagues and native friends as a further safeguard and method of enhancing data credibility.

An audit trail was maintained to reflect the rationale for unfolding study decisions, hunches, guesses and feelings that the researcher experienced throughout the course of the study.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the methodology used to carry out the study. Twelve informants formed the interview base from which the major research questions of the study were addressed. Member checks ensure the credibility of data interpretation. The informants' feelings, descriptions, and opinions regarding their perceptions of local control were gathered. The data was categorized into emergent themes, and shall be presented in this format in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Data Synthesis

Introduction

This chapter contains a synthesis of data gathered from informants in the study. Emergent themes and analysis appear in the next chapter. A series of interviews provided the data. All interviewees responded to certain, basic questions (see Appendix B). The interview's content lead to other questions. This technique was necessary to draw out people's responses, so as to get at their perceptions. Questions centered on the issues of local control that appeared most important to the people in the community. The chapter also includes a short background regarding this community.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a description of how the informants perceived the concept of local control, and how it would affect their lives. Sectors of the community involved in this study included parents, educators, band administrators, former students, community elders, and members of the Department of Indian and Inuit Affairs. There was no attempt made to interview all community groups, but there was even distribution of participants from the groups that were represented. The number and selection of participants are limiting factors of this study.

Background

The Ish-Nish reserve is a small community of approximately eight hundred people. The people of the Ish-Nish Reserve speak predominantly a local native language and

English. The main religion of this community is Catholic, but some of the residents are Protestant. The community has one Catholic church. The physical structures of the village include:

> ... homes, a band office, a medical service's building, a fire hall (housing both band police and fire fighting personnel), a Day Care Center, a community hall, a plant for water treatment, the former Federally operated school, and the new Ish-Nish Elementary Junior High School.

The Ish-Nish Band Office is the administrative center for the reserve. The chief and council make all decisions affecting the welfare of the community from the band office. Social agencies that carry out their operations from this building include: Social Services, Child Welfare, the Recreation Department, and Community Education (Employment & Development). The medical service's building provides all the medical care, including Drug and Alcohol Abuse Programs. Employees of this facility include a program director, one full time nurse and three local community health representatives. A medical doctor and a dentist make regular visits to the reserve. The fire hall and the police station share one building. Three band police enforce community, provincial and federal laws. A team of four firemen mans the one fire truck.

September 1990 marked the structural completion of the new school. It is a much larger and better facility than the old school, but, on opening day, it was already too small. The government revamped the construction standards for schools shortly after approval of the new school. The chief and council made an important decision. If they waited, they would have a larger school. A delay of at least two years would ensue, however. The facility was necessary, and the decision was to proceed. The school needed expansion before its completion. The school immediately required a portable. Requests are in place for a second portable. Future expansion is necessary. The student population has

increased sharply (nearly tripling). This school is now band controlled (as of September 1990).

The Department of Indian and Inuit Affairs operated the old school. Essentially, the building has undergone little modification since being built more than forty years ago. It has three classrooms on the main floor and two classrooms in the basement. One of the rooms in the basement acted as a gym during the winter months, and a resource room at other times. The student population had fluctuated from a high of over one hundred students to a low of approximately forty-five children. Many parents chose to send their children to surrounding county schools. The building is currently being considered for use as a center for adult education.

Development of Local Control on the Ish-Nish Reserve

Although "... no one knows, exactly ..." when the talk started, Ish-Nish politicians have long asserted the need for a new community school. Talk of a new school began, following an "evaluation" of the Federally operated reserve school, around 1976. It was kind of a "joke" the way that, "... the whole thing came about."

> We asked for a water treatment plant and sewer system, and it was something that was quite far fetched at that time. But, the Lord beholds, Indian Affairs approved it. And we said that, 'if something like this could be approved I am pretty sure that we could get a new school approved'. So, we made that submission right away. We put forth a BCR [band council resolution] at that time, to at least, get that request in there. After the [school] evaluation showed that there was ... problems with the reserve school.

Another school evaluation, in the spring of 1981, demonstrated clearly to the band that there were very serious educational problems on the reserve. Local control became a topic of conversation.

> When we first talked about it, we didn't even call it local control. It was after the completion of our evaluation ... in the Spring of 1981 ... what it showed us was not a pretty picture. All along we kind of knew that we had problems in education. But I think that's where it [local control] really started from - this trying to improve, and how to improve something if you don't have control. . . . What the band said at that time was that, 'we've got to do something about some of the problems that we were having'. Eventually they started talking about taking a little more responsibility to combat some of the problems that our school system was having...

This evaluation basically demonstrated that the problems which many native groups across Canada were experiencing were also rampant on the Ish-Nish Reserve. The Department of Indian Affairs provided "some moneys" to complete a "facility study and a community infrastructure planning assessment" of possible sites for a new school. "Talk" of the need for a new school preceded any talk of local control. There was growing discontent with the Federally operated reserve school.

> ... We started pushing hard towards that new school. There were several reasons, I guess, that preceded the discussion on takeover. . . . We felt that the level of education, the level of programing, the teaching staff in Federal schools was not at par with the provincial schools. . . . The feeling was in the Education Committee, the chief and council at the time, and the community at large ... [that there was a need for] ... better programing, ... for better teaching staff, and the need of more native curriculum development, and the implementation of the native curriculum development as full fledged programs in school.

In the Fall of 1983, some discussions began, primarily at the band level. They were considering takeover of certain programs (i.e., health and education) that were "provided by Indian Affairs." "Talk" of takeover continued over the next several years, but only among the politicians on the Ish-Nish Band. Eventually, these take over discussions became linked with building a new school on the reserve. There was a feeling among the politicians that the building of the new school and 'negotiations' for a takeover of the school should go on together, as a "package deal."

In the spring of 1986, under direction of the Ish-Nish chief and council, discussions began with Indian Affairs.

> I guess when we first discussed [local control] with the Department we asked for funding. We wrote ... a proposal to do a plan for an eventual takeover. This planning was supposed to be done over a two year period. In order to do that we asked for some funds from the Department. We went through the two years planning process, which sort of laid out, step by step, what the takeover would entail - what needed to be done before we took over. Those kinds of things. [We looked at what] implications the takeover would have on the reserve, on the community, for the chief and council, on the innovators, for the students and so on. So those kinds of things we studied for two years.

Much correspondence ensued between the band and the Department of Indian Affairs. In September 1987, the department asked the Ish-Nish Band to be ready for takeover in September 1988. January 1988 brought confirmation of the school's construction. The Band asked that takeover "should coincide with the opening of the new school." A Band letter to the Department of Indian Affairs "indicated that we would not start negotiating the takeover until the new school is completed." The band

> ... felt that there was no need to takeover if this was to be done in the old school ... We felt that takeover should coincide with the opening of the new school. Which then, at that time, was supposed to be in September of this year, 1989. Now there has been a delay again until September of 1990.
>
> Council has made a commitment [another stated], 'yes, we will work toward taking over control and we will enter into negotiations'. But whether we will take over they [the Ish-Nish Band] are not committed themselves ... That's not a commitment, and Indian Affairs knows of this. "Once we know what the benefits are. Once we know what the concerns are, what the setbacks might be, then only will we decide to take over."

At a meeting in April 1989, the Band agreed to start negotiations in September 1990. This coincided with the expected date of the new school's operation.

Problems with the Old School - a Second Class Program and Building

The Federal Department of Indian and Inuit Affairs provided schooling for children on the Ish-Nish reserve since the 1950's. They built a school, but made no major changes

to the building for over 40 years. Some members of the community felt that there were problems with the old Federally operated school, and those that worked in it.

What did the community think of the teachers at the old school?

> [They were] ... maybe surplus teachers that other reserves don't want ... maybe teachers who couldn't get jobs with the county system ... It's a bit better ... but before! ... We settled with school teachers who maybe have come into this country as immigrants. The government was not able to find a job for them with their kind of training I guess, and they went and gave us those teachers. . . . These people seemed to have more problems with the English language. I don't think that was helping our kids. I think that kids learn from the way the teacher talks. These [teachers] were having just as much problem or more of a problem than we had. We had to live with it ... it didn't help our children when these teachers taught in our schools. We had our own problems. Our kids had to learn from them. I don't think it did our kids any good.

Many parents started out sending their children to the federally operated reserve school, but then stopped. One parent had only her youngest child in the kindergarten program at the local school. She felt that he was too young to travel to a county school. At the time of the interview, she planned on sending him to the county school for grade one. One of her elder children was "put back" a year when he transferred to a county school.

> Something must be wrong. . . . I don't want my kids ... falling further behind. . . . I don't like the teachers ... [at the reserve school] I am afraid for my children ... [other children at the reserve school harassed her son.] ... I didn't want my kids to go through that ... They don't need that. They don't need to be attacked. I know what goes on at that school.
>
> Indian Affairs always sent teachers to us, and the stories I hear from the children who are now adults really horrifies me. Under local control, we would have a chance to pick those teachers who are caring and capable of teaching our children.

No matter how good the teachers, without proper facilities, any educational program might fail. I asked one participant, "Why do the children go to the county school?"

> Its decreasing [student enrollment] because we ... can't offer the programs that are offered in the county schools. Like a gym, we also don't have an art center, a

> space where we can do all these things. We don't have a science center for chemistry and things like that. These kinds of things our children need.

A community leader stated:

> The little school we have [has] absolutely nothing in there. No white people would send their children to our little school. [The county school] ... has a lot to offer my kids ...

Many of the parents of the community remember attending the reserve school when they were youngsters. As students, and now as parents, some members of the community still feel alienated. They indicate that parental involvement in school functions has always been low. One adult mentioned

> When people here talk about the little school, do you ever hear them say **our** school? No ... it's always **the** school, or the **Federal** school. No body thinks of it as ours ... we need our own.

Lack of Student Preparation for life off the reserve

One parent explained the difference between the reserve school and a school

> some place else. . . . You go to the county, there are more subjects to take [and] you'll have more homework. Our kids go to the county and they think it's very busy. Some of the kids that talk to me think it's very easy to go to school [on the reserve]. I shouldn't say that but one of my kids went to [one of the county schools], she didn't like it and she came back here. I asked her why and she said, 'They're doing so many things at the same time.' She couldn't take them all. [She is referring to all the options and activities available] ... It's slower here, and she gets more done. [Her kids] like coming to school here, fewer people in the classrooms, they know everybody and they are comfortable.

Another community member summarized the feelings of many residents regarding education on the reserve.

> I don't mind saying that in the past that teachers who were employed by Indian Affairs were second rate to the teachers employed by the province. The curriculum used was outdated. The textbooks were outdated. Facilities were outdated. We never even had a gymnasium or recreational facilities or anything. So the whole system was second rate. Improvements have been made, but the fact is that we are

> still lacking and we are still behind ... How do you succeed without the tools? ... Indian Affairs never took education as one of their priorities.

Not everyone in the community agrees, however. One school employee resents the negative feelings that parents seem to have towards the school.

> This second class ... negative feeling is cause some parents say, 'You don't get taught enough things so that when our kids go to the county schools they're so far behind.' Discipline gets complained about by some parents. They don't really know the school. . . . I work hard ... [and] am really bothered ... when people ... come into our school and say, 'Well, can we see what kind of books you use?'; or 'What levels are the kids at?'

Enrollment

The parents expressed their negative feelings in the most effective manner. The Ish-Nish school faced dwindling enrollments. Student population was approximately 45 students in the 89 - 90 school year. [Note: during the 90 - 91 school year; the first year of band controlled operation; the student population was 172.]

Devolution - The Pressures To Go 'Local'

In recent years, band leadership finds itself pressured to assume control of their school programs.

> The Band feels that they are being pressured by the Department to go for it because of the policy they have on devolution. . . . The Department of Indian and Inuit Affairs is almighty in trying to force us into it.
>
> We really want to be sure of ourselves in this one.
>
> ... Like when the Department wants to do anything ... like make adjustments to the Indian Act. They go ahead with it whether we agree with it or not ... We had better be prepared for it ... I never really thought about local control being important. It's just something that all Bands are going to do in the future - sooner or later. We had just better be ready when it's our turn.
>
> Let's face it; the country is in a very bad financial way. They are going to cut corners at all costs; and maybe these are the ways of cutting their costs. . . . Besides, sometimes we need a little shove ourselves.

> It's inevitable that all Indian schools in Alberta are going to be band controlled anyway by 1992. . . . The Band knows that, sooner or later, they will have to take control themselves whether they like it or not.

The Education Development Committee (EDC)

This feeling of inevitability regarding the Federal Government's policy of 'devolution' has impacted on the Education Development Committee.

> ... The intensity of the meetings and the expressed concern by some members of the committee is that we've got to be ready and going to have to get ready. So there is a sense of urgency knowing that this is coming and they, themselves know that they are not ready at the present time ... they are working rapidly towards getting going.

With the May 1988 passage of a BCR, the Ish-Nish Band had officially indicated their interest in assuming control of the school's educational program. This declaration, on the part of the band, allowed them to access devolution funds for the sole purpose of investigating band take over of the educational program on the Ish-Nish reserve. Organization of an Education Development Committee swiftly followed, but the committee did not meet until November.

> ... For the first six months we didn't do very much because we never could get the committee together. We couldn't get a quorum together. We started to meet in November 1988 ... for the first six months nothing really happened. So, since November, we have been meeting regularly and a lot of things have been done.

The people who filled the first three committee positions also assumed various duties in the band office. Seven positions on the committee remained vacant for a long period of time. No one seemed to be truly interested within the community. The main goals and objectives of the Educational Development Committee, were to

> study and research, then develop and plan policies for the administration of the new school, employment policies, administration policies, financial policies, student policies, busing policies. . . . Administrative types of things that you have to have in order to run a school properly.

[The committee meets] monthly for an entire day ... [to] discuss the direction of the proposed band controlled school. What is wanted, what is needed, and how it's going to be achieved.

Selection of Members to the EDC

[The band administration] ... felt that the people who were on the Education Committee should be part of the Education Development Committee [along with] ... some appointments. . . . In past years we've had numerous turnovers on the committee ... In the past ... committee members were selected [by means of] a competition. Because we advertised vacancies, people were interviewed, and then they were appointed to the committee. But it turned out that not the best people were the most suited on the committee.

The competition route did not always produce the best results. Some members chosen this way contributed

... very little input. A lot of them missed meetings. We seldom had a quorum and things like that. . . . Three steady members of the Education Committee and ... [the band operations manager] would form part of the committee. . . . We appointed three more members from the community that we felt would contribute and work.

The EDC - its Authority and Decision Making Process

What decision making authority does the EDC have?

[the committee has] ... no authority at all to make decisions, but only to recommend ... This committee will ... draft ... policies ... These policies will be recommended to the chief and council. Once the chief and council approves them, they will be recommended to Indian Affairs.

The committee reaches decisions based on "discussion and consensus." For example:

... at the beginning I propose[d] to the committee ... our purpose and objectives ... we had a discussion on it, and we all agreed 'that's our purpose and those are our goals'. Then we took it from there. Each meeting we took it step by step. The first meeting we went over concerns. Concerns with the present system. Concerns with the teachers. Concerns with the students. Concerns with the drop out rate. Those kinds of things. Then we said, 'what can we do to overcome these concerns?' And it seemed that in nine out of ten situations there was a need for a procedure, for policies, you know, those kinds of things. So that's how we started developing policies.

...

> We still go back to the needs surveys that we did over the past five, six, seven years, and look at those needs and say 'what has been done since?' and ask 'what action needs to be done?' Then as a committee we say 'yes, that's what we should do.' Secondly, decisions are made through resource people that we bring in. People who are professional educators. People who have knowledge with regard to policies and procedures that are implemented in schools province wide. Those people come into our meetings, we take their advice, and follow their advice on many occasions ... Once we take over we will have a school board. Naturally the school board will have certain authorities, but the committee is responsible to chief and council and can only make recommendations to council.

> [OK, we wanted to get some ideas about how to go about setting up our policies, authorities and stuff like that. We talked about it in general terms, what we wanted to do and ... [then] we just asked the province to come in and give us a hand. He provided a framework as to how to do things ... he gave us [some] general direction.

The EDC's Preparation for Take Over

The committee prepared for take over, according to the participants, by looking at other schools which had gone local. They visited other schools in the region, around the province, and some in the United States. They sought information as to:

> what their experiences have been, and what they were lacking. We have to learn from their mistakes. . . . We looked at a lot of research done - need's research and education surveys. . . . We had some professional people from the University of British Columbia visit ... [we] talked to people from the University of Alberta ... and the Alberta Native Development [Branch].

EDC - Their Findings

The committee worked at "gathering all the facts and concerns." They wanted to commit them to paper so that when the new school opened "everything will be written down, and everything in place of the things that we want ... all these things will be presented in one big package to the council, and to Indian Affairs." The long range goals and objectives include native teachers and native curriculum as part of the new school. The "more immediate goal is to make sure that we get first rate quality teachers and principals from the outside." The committee developed criteria for teachers, the principal, curriculum and teaching methods, discussing these issues at length.

> A financial administrative system [must be] in place for that. The committee must develop a teaching system and learning system that makes learning and schooling interesting for the kids and to the parents. . . . Creating interest is crucial ... At the present time we are loosing kids in our school ... and ... the reason is mainly that the teaching is not interesting enough to the kids. The parents are not happy with the teachers. So they take their kids out and take them to the provincial schools. They feel that they get better teaching there. . . . What we've got to do is to create a pride and awareness in the community among the parents that 'yes, we are going to have the quality school, we are going to have quality teachers, we are going to have quality education there'. So that has to be developed to make sure that we don't have a beautiful new school and we don't have any kids in that school.

EDC - The Problems

There were problems getting all of this accomplished, however. When asked how things were going during the meetings, one member mentioned that he was

> a little frustrated ... It's a very slow process. I think that [meeting] once a month is not enough. I think that we should even delegate people to start writing for us. To draw things up, you know, different kinds of alternatives and bring them back to the meeting for us to view. To really get it going ... My frustration is that it is going so slow.

It was slow because different people had differing notions of the priorities of the committee. Some members seemed primarily concerned with the financing aspects. Other factions concerned themselves with ensuring that the "education delivered to the students should be equal to and preferably better than any provincial school around, and better than the existing Federal schools." One member of the committee stated that they are intent on making the school as attractive as possible - physically, academically and culturally. For many years, the Federally operated school has had a negative image in the eyes of some parents - a "second class school with a second class program." They want to fill the new school to capacity, so they must fight these images. The committee believes that they must put a quality program in place to attract those students currently attending off reserve provincial schools. The challenge, is not so much to attract the students to the new band

operated school but to keep them coming back year after year. The school must be a viable alternative to the county schools.

> I think that the rationale for building a new school is that it's a new building, we takeover, we run it and the students are just going to come pouring back. If they come back and then leave in a month ... the consequences could be very damaging.
>
> We need highly competent teachers and support staff, parental involvement, a local program of studies involving both academics and culture, a school philosophy and a school manual. Truancy can't be allowed cause student attendance is so important. We **have** to enhance student self esteem and achievement.
>
> Initially, there were problems with "the commitment" of some of the people
>
> So, since we appointed some people it seems to have improved, and the group seems to be happier. It seems that some good ideas have come out of the meetings ... [But, in the beginning] I wasn't very happy with the committee at all. I was very frustrated and disappointed. But things are better now.
>
> [Now the meetings are really] going good. It's really going good. The only bad part of it is that there is so much darn work. But you know it's going to happen. We went through a lot of our concerns; we're making recommendations to those concerns and now were looking at policy development to address those concerns.

He spoke with a sense of confidence and excitement. "By 1990, things will be all done."

Soon a commitment problem appeared again and the EDC seemed to fall by the wayside. As a member of the Task Force later commented

> I don't know whatever happened to the education committee. All I know is that we don't seem to be aware of anything that they actually got around to accomplishing. They talked, I guess, but they didn't seem to come up with anything that they finished.

Perceptions of Local Control

Every faction of the community appears to have their own perception of local control. Members of the Ish-Nish Band tended to share some views in common, but, frequently, these were in direct opposition to federal employee perceptions.

A Band Perspective of Local Control

Ish-Nish Band members' comments ranged from the personal level, school curriculum or the community level, to the political.

Local Control - "What Exactly Is It?"

Two words that participants in this study frequently equated with local control were "self government." The definitions supplied were many and varied, but they all provide insight into how these people view this situation. Although she admits that she doesn't understand exactly what the term means, one interviewee thinks it has something to do with

> taking over from the Feds, and administering education at the band level, and it means running your own government system ... Not asking someone whether we can do this or that. [Local control means] ... that the local people look after ... funding ... education ... and administration of the general band office.
>
> [Being] able to make decisions [about] ... controlling the funds and recruiting personnel, the teachers, and ... having some say in what is being taught in the school. It means entering into funding arrangements with Indian Affairs.

To another informant, local control means "a people giving their education to their young." It also means

> ... participat[ing] in the education of our native children, and for our membership to be more aware of what's happening in education. It may even mean changing some of our values towards not only the education of our children in our traditional ways but also in the more dominant ways. . . . Preparing our kids to survive on the outside. . . . Let's face it; education is the only way to do that.
>
> [Local control] means regaining some control over our lives as a people ... and the lives of our children. . . . [Local control] would mean that ... we have the opportunity to look at what our needs are - what the needs are for our children. It means having the parents involved. Indian Affairs is always dictating to us what our needs are. With us doing it for ourselves at least we will be able to do what we want with our lives. It's so hard when people have control over our lives. We have always lived like that. We have always been dictated to ... The dominant society [have] really, really degraded the Indian people. We are still fighting to gain some control over our lives.

Local Control - School can be Relevant

Control of the school program would also mean that the school curriculum could be "enrich[ed] ... having ... [the] language taught within [this] system." Closely associated with the inclusion of language, local control would afford "greater opportunities for our children" by having the ability in the school to tie the children's cultural background to "different spiritual practices." Programing Indian practices in the federally operated school in the past has been difficult to do because, "the school was never really ours."

> [Local control means]... independence, finally being able to make decisions that directly affect the education experience of our children. It means that we have to develop our own curriculum. Whatever we want in our school. So we have to develop that and put it in place, and our people have to do that. Not somebody else.

This notion of determining the curriculum for their children is a crucial aspect to the meaning of local control. "Being able to plan and decide what to do on our own" is a key component of assuming control of the school. Being able to "tell the school to put 'things' in the curriculum" is important. One recalled that when he was a student going to school, they couldn't speak their native language in the hallway.

> Nowadays schools have changed, and students are free to speak any language without restraint. Only in recent years have my children started to learn [the Local language]. That's very good. They come home and they talk [the Local language] and we talk to them. They aren't afraid; they aren't ashamed. Their teacher[s] let them talk the local language in the classroom.

Local control, according to many of the band informants, will provide the community with an opportunity to influence directly what gets taught to their children, to "have a say in what happens."

Local Control - a Boon to the Community

Local control has importance at the community level as well.

> First of all local control means commitment and involvement by everyone in the community, particularly the parents and the chief and council ... Unless we have full commitment and involvement by the community, local control doesn't mean very much ... the only reason for local control is that we want to improve the

> students' ... educational level ... the dropout rate ... the percentage of students graduating and we want to improve the programing ... We can lay out all of the policies and procedures in the world, and we can develop all of the curriculum in the world but unless people are committed to it, and people are involved with it, not much will happen ... that's what local control means to me.

With everyone in the community involved, control of the school could mean greater economic prosperity for the Ish-Nish Reserve. Depending on the "type of authority," local control could "creat[e] some employment." By being in control of the "educational service delivery," it is likely that job opportunities in the construction of the school, at the school in terms of teaching and secretarial positions, and in related tasks at the band office would be available.

Local Control - a Political Issue

> [Local control was seen as] ... an advancement of administrative control ... the Department would have a legal responsibility to provide to the Band those [financial and human] resources necessary to carry out the educational program on the reserve ... That way the Department can be charged with that responsibility at this point.

He ties this to native rights. He is emphatic that until the question of aboriginal rights is settled between treaty Indians in Canada and the federal government,

> I would be very very hesitant in wanting ... this band ... [to go] into the direction of complete control ... [T]he whole area of treaty is unanswered yet ... Hopefully we will get the United Nations support on having to have Canada deal with the treaty rights to aboriginal people in Canada ... That has to be secured and placed within the Canadian constitution where it can't be changed ... Until that takes place, I can't see ourselves completely in control of the education program out here.

The premise of this contention is that the people who signed these treaties, over one hundred years ago, had little understanding of what they were signing. They did not know the implications these treaties would have for future generations. Many participants expressed frustration with the federal government officials. At least one high ranking

bureaucrat has expressed the view that "post secondary education [was not] a treaty right." This stems from

> the falsification of the treaty understanding where our forefathers were promised a lot of things that wasn't in writing because they didn't understand English language and it was all done through interpreters. The Queen's representatives at that time saw an opportune time to take advantage of the red-man who did not master their language and philosophies ... today as a result of that, it places Indian leadership in a very difficult position.

This band should only go local if the band can continue "to hold the Department responsible for its legal obligations through the present system," at least in this participant's opinion.

> [To one community member local control also means] signing agreements, working within boundaries of contracts, boundaries of contributions ... But let's face it, it's not really local control is it? ... It's their way to get out of the Federal responsibility to the Indian treaties ... [W]e have to maintain and protect the fact that education is a treaty right.
> ...
> It's inevitable, ... but, it can be used as a negotiation strategy to work out a better educational system for our children ... The school should be no different from the provincial schools with the additional features of the The local language language and we'll have our elders teaching our children, and religion [will also be] taught in our school. We feel very strongly about that as a people.

A Civil Service Perspective

Federal employees working in the reserve school face a bleak prospect when the band decides to take control of the school. More than one had worked there for more than eight years. What does local control mean to them?

> It means one of two possible things ... leave the community to seek employment elsewhere in the Federal service, or secondly, leave the Federal Government and go with the band to work at the school.

Most Federal school employees right across Canada face much the same options. There is also the possibility that

> once Federal employees receive their layoff notices there may be no employment offered to the individual ... either as a Federal employee or as a band employee.

Although the same prospect exists for people who happen to be native Federal employees, the situation appears to be less bleak for them. With more and more bands across Canada assuming control over their educational programs, native teachers should be in high demand. As this study shows, many bands, including the Ish-Nish Band, will be searching for native teacher's with experience to fill their classrooms.

The prospects are, nonetheless, very frightening for Federal employees if "word gets out" that a band is thinking about local control. One respondent summed it up as

> very confusing and upsetting ... The Department is saying one thing and the Band is saying another ... Like now and then I hear that the Band may be taking control ... But then I talk to [a councilor who confides in her about Band business] ... and he says, "No, no, we're not ready yet." Talk of local control adds stress to an already difficult job.
>
> This can be demoralizing to staff, not knowing what the future holds especially for the people who have been with the government for some period of time. They have built up a long standing relationship with the government and now their being told that they cannot work in a certain location. There are fewer and fewer places available in the province for them to seek a position. They know in a few years there is not going to be a job with the Department of Indian Affairs. It's kind of demoralizing as a professional. I think this is reflected in their professionalism and enthusiasm in teaching.

Bands "don't let teachers know if they are going to be hired until the last minute." This creates feelings of "uncertainty," "curtails teaching abilities," and "interferes with [teaching] performance" among those most affected by the pending 'take over.' As an 'affected' reserve teacher stated

> You know that there is no long range future ... You are always thinking in the back of your mind 'well what's going to be happening to me?' Consequently the dedication is not going to be there.

Talk of local control on the Ish-Nish Reserve has affected the school program. The majority of the school's teaching staff are Federal employees. The Superintendent came to visit the school in the fall of 1988, and

> teachers knew ... that ... they would really have to be looking around for alternative employment. Some teachers were getting resumes written up. They were getting references. They were starting to look around for other [teaching] positions. This was interfering with their teaching here.

This educator respondent felt that teachers cannot do their job effectively under this type of pressure.

> Working for the band under a local control situation does not appear to be a viable alternative for teachers from the 'outside.' Teachers feel that working for the band would not be that 'secure.' The Federal employee benefit packages would not be transferable to bands. Local politics could play too powerful a force in determining the direction and philosophy of the school ... [Currently w]e do follow the Alberta curriculum as much as possible with the extra time devoted to local culture. In a band controlled school who determines the curriculum? Is it going to be a constant vacillation between the education coordinator and possibly the education committee? The administration of the school - are they going to have to be swaying with the whims of the local authorities? ... Are we going to be professionals? Are we just going to impart local culture and do whatever the community wants to do at that particular time?

If the teachers were to work with the band, would they receive the current level of professional support and development, as they do from the Department of Indian Affairs?

From an educator's perspective, why does the band want to assume local control? What is the motivation?

> Possibly they felt that they could do a better job. The cultural component is very important. Once a child gets into junior high their exposure to their own culture is very limited. It would be a chance for them to have a lot more of that instruction if the band had control of the school.

Local Control - Will it Improve the School?

Everyone interviewed viewed local control as being very important, but for all different reasons.

"This is our School and that's Dignity"

> It let's us get some control over our lives. We can feel more in control of ourselves. We can do what we want. Our people will feel some dignity ... there's going to be a difference, because [the school's] going to be ours ... [if] we had control over the school program we would do what needs to be done."

For decades, the people of the Ish-Nish Reserve have relied totally on governmental policy, and what it dictated as to their educational program.

> It's important that students, parents, politicians can decide their own destiny ... Now it's going to be strictly up to ... [the] community how far their children will go, and how far they will develop. It's not left up to the ... whims of the government, or how many grants they get ... or what textbooks they can use, or what kind of teachers will be hired. To me, taking over control is sort of like self determination. You can decide your future.

"Saving our language"

Local control is viewed as a way in which the local language and culture can "survive."

> If we had our own school we would have a [local] language program for our children. There are a lot of little things that are important to us ... We can't be[come] extinct. To me it seems that we have always been pushed aside slowly, pooled together on a reserve.
>
> [The local language is slowly being forgotten.] people don't even speak [The local language] around here anymore ... [T]hat's so important that the children learn their language ... that is the main way of holding onto your culture.

The control of the new school provides a way to ensure the survival of the [local language] Indian Culture and it's language.

> It provides a mechanism ... for parents to be involved in education by assisting with the teaching of our own culture and language. [It is essential] ... because it

> provides, not only the opportunity to practice our culture and our language but for the young people that's the tool for survival. [The] parents will come to recognize the value of an education by being directly involved in the school program.

Another parent commented

> ... children have lost the ability to speak [the local language]. [They] ... don't understand their own culture. In some ways, we have lost touch with our own children. Kids now-a-days are losing where they came from. They are losing the language. When you try and teach them they laugh at you. It's good that they know, then they will understand their own culture. The school [the old school] don't offer the [local] language. The only language they can take is French besides English.

This could be changed with a community school board. The language could be taught, and other cultural aspects could be infused.

> That is the only way that we can maintain our identity. The elders will be able to teach our children the proper way. If we had our own school we would have our own place for sweats, and sweetgrass ceremonies.

"For the first time" we would have an opportunity "to teach our children about the native language right from the beginning. Right from Kindergarten." Local people in the community can be used to help out in the school. Parents can "work with the Kindergarten children teaching them the ... language and culture."

> So with that assistance and ... in the grade one and up to grade six [a] native study program [can be implemented]. We can also have a regular study program which is required by the province like math, social, science etc. Those courses that are required would form part of the provincial program of study. So [those courses] can be integrated with the ... language and culture. That is very positive.

Other Benefits

The band chooses who teaches at the school. In this way,

> [W]e will be able to go out there and look for the best possible teacher[s] and administrator. Because to me the only thing that is important is quality - quality education. . . . we are forever talking about someday we will have doctors, lawyers and teachers, [but] the way I see it, unless we have a quality education where we can prepare our people to be these things we will never have that.

Local control gives the band administration an opportunity to address, and perhaps resolve, the serious student drop out rate in the community. "There is a hell of a slippage [in student graduates] and we are going to have to correct that slippage, and try to find out what the problem is." By direct intervention, the band may have more of an impact on the parents, thus keeping the students in school longer. Parents could see the importance of schooling.

> That message has to filter into the community and hopefully the parents will finally realize the value of an education and impose some stringent rules on why their kids should be attending school.

The new band controlled school will bring many jobs for members of the community. This might help them to see the value of an education.

> for one thing we will have our own people employed there. We will have a sense of pride by having our own people working there. Like even now, the people from this community are building that school.
>
> They will look to that school as something that they have built, and that's important. We will look at the school as something that we did ourselves.
>
> We will feel really proud that we have contributed something to our kids education.

Local control will not only bring greater economic prosperity with the creation of jobs, but will also provide much needed educational awareness and educational advancement opportunities for adults in the community to better themselves.

> [Local control] is going to create an economic opportunity where people will be employed within the system ... there are some middle aged people ... who are being encouraged to go to university and get a teaching certificate. I think there are a few there who are looking at public education whenever we take over control.

A new community school gives the children new found incentives to want to finish their schooling.

> For pride I guess. The kids will know that this is their school. That's its run by their parents, and maybe once they realize that, then maybe that might be another form of incentive. This could be another way to try to make them want to be more successful.
>
> To motivate them to want to finish school. That maybe one day they will want to come back and be a school teacher here or principal or whatever.

Interest and involvement in education should be increased for both the parents and the children.

> Not to have control is not to have any say in the education of our children which is completely wrong as far as I am concerned. Let's face it, in the past, we all know that it never worked for us. We have to start looking at ways of improving and that's the only way that I can see is us taking control of the educational programs. Having a say as to what is taught in school.
>
> [We can] ... prove to the general public, the non-Indian public, that there are some things that the community can do with the support of it's members. The children will find themselves proud. This gives the confidence needed to accomplish some of the challenges that are facing us.

The dominant society takes many aspects of education for granted. No less than three of this study's participants mentioned that with local control, they wold have some recourse if their children did not receive the supplies to which they were entitled. This was a totally unexpected point, but seemed to warrant further investigation.

> Sometimes my kids, my daughters, have to get me to sign on forms for the county, saying that they got stuff that they didn't. They [the County] wanted me to sign even though my daughters didn't go on the field trip. They went ahead and billed the Department anyway. And when our kids need supplies they get the run around.

These children face other problems. His children are

> teased and put-down by the 'white kids' at the County school. Sometimes they call them squaw, wagon-burners ... and Indian but they use this 'f' word before Indian and it hurts them. If they try to defend themselves, they get kicked out of school.

A local community run school could provide a safe haven for children. Once they have their pride in their culture, they might be able to face hostile environments better equipped to cope.

A community oriented school should reduce this alienation, both for the parents and the students. One of the educators feels that under the Federal school system, parents provide "no input" into the affairs of the school.

> They feel that they are not involved or not asked to be involved. At the last parent teacher interviews, much less than half of the parents bothered to come to the school to pick-up report cards and talk to the teachers. There are likely only two explanations. Disinterest or could be apprehension about coming into the school setting where they are unfamiliar and possibly feel not welcome.
>
> The new school could bring the parents into the school, and this would have an overall positive effect on the children. The parents could identify with the school as being 'our school.' With local control you would feel more at home."
>
> [Teachers and support staff] ... are more likely to be from within the immediate area which provides more of a sense of belonging, both to parents and children. A community school can give parents, elders, and children something tangible that they can be proud of, and feel a "sense of home."

"Is the Band Ready?"

All informants, with one exception, were in agreement that the Ish-Nish Band was not ready for community control of their educational program.

> [Local control] is something very very new to our people. I think that just the people that work in education and the Chief and Council might know anything about local control. It has never been brought to our people before. But the feeling that I get from the people that I talk to about it is that 'we are not ready.'

"We Don't Have the Expertise Yet"

The feeling is that not only is the local control concept a relatively new phenomena, but that no one has the "expertise" to get the "show on the road."

> ... Mainly because we don't have the people to work behind us. The people that will run the whole system - administrators, that sort of thing.
>
> We have to know what we are doing. We are not ready yet. I know that because we don't have any people trained or anything like that. We don't have anyone in high school or university. . . . We will always depend on outsiders.

The speaker strongly believes that certain things must be in place before local control can begin. He feels that "things" like administering teacher, principal and janitorial salaries, the hiring of teachers, the training of maintenance men for the school furnaces and plumbing, and training the bus driver in first aide must be addressed.

Others also point to areas in which they feel that the band members require training. For this to work, "there must be some assurances by the federal government that they are willing to provide the training [of local people] and the necessary needs for administering that [school] program."

> We need training. Who will look after education at the Ish-Nish School under local control? People who look after education at the Ish-Nish School now are experienced, go to school and have finished university. We don't have those kinds of people on the reserve. So if anybody was going to do that they must have the right kind of education to run it properly. It's important to get people who know what they are doing. Right now I don't think we have people with that experience.

Many are concerned that it will be impossible to find a school administrator from within the local community.

> In the past, many principals of the Ish-Nish School have come and gone because they had disagreements with the chief and council. Several years ago there was a hot meeting between the Ish-Nish School principal and the chief and council. The principal wanted better standards but the council didn't agree with the way in which the principal was going about it. They BCR'd him. Leadership is a big problem. We are not ready because if we want to run it the way we want it, then it must be one of us to do that. [The administrator must not only be] ... trained and skilled, but must be one of us. He must know and understand us - our culture and tradition.

As a parent in the community summed it up, the school principal should be an "educated native" person. She states that if the administrator comes "from a background the way we did, he would better understand."

"They're Forcing Local Control on Us"

The consensus of respondents appears to be that if self government is going to be forced upon them, then they had better be ready to "run our own affairs."

> We are simply not prepared to go through with local control now. [And yet,] I simply can't see an outsider coming in and doing it for us either. That's not really us taking over if someone is going to run it for us. It's got to be our own people doing it.
>
> It's important because the people of this reserve know what's best for their kids as far as education is concerned, and nobody else.

"What's Been Done?"

"Talk is cheap, but have we actually got anything done?," queries one community member.

> I don't even think that we have a school philosophy yet. What does the school want to accomplish? Where has been [the] discussion about this. There have been suggestions made. There have been lists compiled of what would be nice, but to actualize this, and how we're going to run the school to achieve this high academic standard, this high cultural standard - how is that going to be done? Is there a plan in place than can be put in the school and be used every day? It's very easy to philosophize and say 'this is what we want' but how do you achieve it? There is also the administrative level. . . . There is talk of a school board, a school committee ... either one of them -who are they accountable to? Are they going to be directly accountable to the Chief and Council financially? Are they going to be a separate entity where they are allotted x numbers of dollars for the operation of the school, and they operate it as they see fit? .... So it's in these areas that work has to be done.

A committee member replies

> Did they show up on the committee to help? It's easy to sit back and criticize. . . . A workable model is gradually forming. There's been some progress, but there is much more that needs to be done.

Funding

At the time of the interview (June, 1990) the band did not have "a clue" as to how much funding they would be getting to run the school program in September, 1990,

> Money is a problem. We don't have too much money at all. We don't know how much money the Federal Government is going to give us towards the take over because there has been a lot of cutbacks in many different areas. So that is one of the things that I can see as being a problem. I don't know how much success there's going to be should there be a lack of funds in operating the school. I know that it's going to operate, I don't know if it's going to operate to it's fullest in the beginning.

One of the parents expressed much the same concern.

> Well, it's always been the Department of Indian Affairs giving us the money and telling us what we can do with that money. Once we take control, they might not give us that money. There has to be something in place so that the money comes in continuously for us to operate the school. I am really worried about not having enough money. They have to do something about that concern - so that the money will always come in to operate the school.

How will the funding be based? Some are concerned that funding will be tied to student enrollment. Given the current decline in student numbers at the Federally operated reserve school, there may not be enough monies to run the new school. "Right now we have less than 50 students. How much funding would we get if we are tied into a formula based on that?" The new school has special requirements (i.e. quality personnel, supplies, equipment) if this community's wishes are to be fulfilled. If "funding is adequate we can do it. I know we can do it."

The fear is that the funding provided might be minimal, or at borderline levels, if the Federal government " were ever to develop a funding formula based on population. We may not get the money. It may be just enough to get by and that's it. So therefore it may

not make us successful anyway." Canadian taxpayers "have this notion that they are always giving us money". He explains

> What happens is that we get the money [from the Government]. We take it and deposit it in our bank account, and then we turn around and give all that money out to suppliers. Nobody ever thinks about that. A lot of people think that the money stays on the reserve, but it doesn't. It goes to the guys that supply the cement, building materials, the managers and the architects. All those people ... I always think that the government is only using us for economics more than anything else. To provide the bands with funds to keep businesses close to the reserve going. I always think that they are using us that way. All we are doing is turning around and giving all this money out.

The money must be managed well. "We must have the people who know what they are doing. . . . controlling your own money ... if they have local control, the money will be spent and once it's spent we won't have anything to go with." If it is run anything like the department that this respondent has knowledge of, "at least three times a year ... [they] ended up having to ask for more ... [money.] . . . If it's not run right it will just fall apart... [and] ... people will be pulling their kids out and sending them to provincial schools."

Treaty Rights

Getting a mandate from the community to support 'local control' is a concern because it is closely tied to the Federal Government's role in the maintenance of native treaty rights. Although "the first workshop with the band membership is set for the twenty-fourth [of May, 1989], to let people know, particularly the parents, what we are trying to do," the band leadership is not certain how the community will respond to 'taking control' of the reserve school. The band membership might feel that the federal government may be relinquishing some of their treaty obligations to them. This concern is shared by most band informants. The band membership's support is "crucial in the take over process." The support "is there but its just that it has to be verified by a vote of

confidence in the community or by a referendum, or by whatever means the leadership wants to use." The leadership, ultimately, chose not to go back to its membership for this vote of confidence.

Prior to the workshops starting, "except on the committee level, there is a lack of awareness on the reserve itself," regarding local control.

> I can see that there would be a lot of concerns ... that will be expressed by band members, by the community. Once we start making presentations to them about taking over control, and what control means; also there are a lot of concerns ... at chief and council level. Councillors are traditionally very hesitant and very leery about taking something over where Indian Affairs or the Federal Government presently have the responsibility, and that goes back to the treaty rights naturally. A lot of native leaders feel that by taking control they might give up some rights. Those concerns will have to be addressed.

Many members of the community, believe that education is a treaty right.

> The education of native people in Canada is, and always will be, a federal responsibility. We are kind of old fashion in that way that we always feel that they [federal government] should be involved in one way or the other to provide that treaty right for our children.

"Will the School Get Used?"

> If there are proper levels of funding, we will have quality teachers; and administrators can be hired to operate the school. If we have a brand new school with a very poor program our people are not going to send their kids there. . . . If we have a school up there with a very good program, our people will send their kids there. We've got to ensure that there is a quality program in place.

It is essential that the community be convinced that the new locally controlled school is a viable alternative to the provincial schools. Without that support, the take over could not be successful.

> We may not have people who would send their children here to the school ... if we don't get those students we are not going to get funding for sure. We are not going to get the teachers if we don't get the students. So we need those students. Even at

> this very moment we've got to try and do whatever we can in order to sell [local control] to the people in the community.

Selling the school to the community would not be an easy task. Perceptions in the community of the local school are not good.

> Sadly enough to say, there has to be a lobby that has to take place with our own people to convince them that our program is going to be better than the County programs. That's going to take a lot of work.

> What could be said to parents that will change their perceptions?

> Well, for one thing, we'll just tell them that we are providing everything that their children are going to receive in provincial schools plus more. We are going to teach them their language. We are going to have our own people there, and we are going to make education fun, and it should be fun. It's not some place where the kids go and just do work. It's not an institution. Education should be fun.
>
> That's going to take some doing but it's going to be fun doing. There's going to be a lot of new things that are going to be happening and it's going to work. I can see nothing but positive things [from local control.]

A Commitment Needed for Community Involvement

Many of those interviewed agreed that local control could be of benefit to the community. They felt certain that for local control to work, there must be active, genuine participation of the part of everyone in the community; from students, parents, and the chief and council.

> [Local control would work] ... if everybody participated. Like parents are always complaining that things should be done this way and that way. But they don't get involved. They don't come forward. If they all got together and supported each other then it might work.
>
> We need to do a survey. If you call a meeting and ask people to come, no body will show up. You have to go to see everyone individually. Most parents are just not interested. I think that most parents aren't interested. As long as they send [their children] off to school that's it, then the kids have to do the rest. Because most parents are gone evenings.

Many agree that parents must start to take a more active role in the lives of their children's education.

> Our people are just not willing to put out. My failure to finish high school has helped me be a better parent and be able to provide better assistance to my own children. The only reason why I was going to school at that time was because my dad kept telling me to go. He kept pushing me. It's just like the saying, 'you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink.' I kept going to make him happy. But I didn't realize that there were so many other things that were so important ... such as being able to study ... to be able to understand and learn. And today, because of that, because the way I see it, you can't get a job without training. That's how important school is. Now that I look back I can see what made me fail. And because I know what made me fail, it helps me to help my kids.

There must be commitment on the part of the students, as well. The students need

> Work. Discipline. Attitude. That's the bottom line. They [students] have got to spend the time studying instead of going to a show, or running around playing ball or whatever. I think that is the biggest failure we have.

Do you think that local control will help to change student attitudes about school?

> I don't know. Sometimes I think I wish I did, but sometimes I think we are a generation away from realizing that. Like not my generation, but the next generation. Because I think that the next generation will be a lot more successful that we are. The one good thing that you can say about our kids is that they might be quitting but at least they are quitting at high school.

The commitment of the chief and council is imperative if the take over is to be successful. Most informants expressed concern that the community was "kept in the dark" regarding the chief and council's plans until approximately six months before the planned take over. "Very few people in the community " knew anything about local control or what the chief and council were doing in that area.

> It's not going to be easy. Its going to mean a lot of soliciting. It's going to mean a lot of politicking. We might end up rapping on doors to seek support. If the need arises then we'll have to do it.

Band leadership must act as a model for the rest of the community. Parents pointed to the fact that council members must send their own children to the new school, and they must do all that they can to ensure that all reserve children go to the school.

> They will have to work harder to try to get themselves involved in education before any one else can. . . . They are sending their kids away to County schools and expect the people to send their children to the [local school]. They think that they are getting a better education somewhere else. . . . They think that the school here is not offering all the subjects that it should be. they will have to try and change it. I think ... they'll have to show somehow that it'll be the same here as somewhere else. . . . I don't see them going from house to house telling the parents to send their kids to school. If a child quits school they don't bother with him. A couple of young boys quit school at the age of twelve. Just the school counsellor tried to get them back, not the band council, not the people in education.

Justifications for Potential Band Success

> We can do more. Maybe if we had our own bylaws in place. Having kids remain in school until their sixteenth birthday. Maybe this is something we can look at. With support from the [Chief and] Council it could be enforced. We have attendance problems, we have all sorts of problems. Kids missing school, kids being in modified programs. . . . We can have better results.

The band currently runs many programs, as respondents pointed out, and have been successful with them. With parents involved, "we would have better results" in school.

"The Locally Controlled School ... [A] World of Potential"

For many members of this community, the hope for their current and future generations is tied to education. They are looking to local control as a way to "make things better for the kids." There are many different perceptions as to how this can be accomplished.

The Curriculum: Native Culture versus Academics

All respondents in this study felt that the new curriculum must include the academics, religion, and elements of native tradition, culture, and language. There were differences of opinion, however, as to the priority of these components.

"Native Culture Should Be # 1"

> ... language and culture, and I would like to see someone, an elder, come into the school to teach our children how to hunt, trap, and tan hides. I'd like to see the kids go camping, and learn how to fish properly. The children must learn to enjoy and respect wildlife. That's the way I am. . . . It's important that we teach our kids these things. Today a lot of them don't know this. . . . [and this is important] because we don't know what's going to happen in the future. We were taught about these things when we were young but the kids now-a-days don't know these things. . . . We must teach them conservation. There is a certain time of the year when to shoot and a certain time of the year that we don't shoot a deer, a moose, an elk. If we teach our children this now, in the future there will be moose, deer and elk for their children.

Why is this the school's responsibility?

> Parents say that they don't have enough time. You see they are always going places. A lot of parents don't have time to teach their children. So it's up to the school to teach the children what the parents don't have time for.

He feels that if the parents are not doing the teaching, then the school must. Many children

> don't know anything about traditional ceremonies ... [and consequently] have little respect for them. Math and English are important ... but if we are talking about what should be taught in school, white students need to learn about us. Outsiders need to change their attitudes. . . . They see one drunk Indian, and ... they paint all Indians with the same brush. . . . That really hurts me. And yet you see their own people drunk. Nobody says anything about that. You see them falling down and yelling. Nobody says anything about that. But if they see an Indian doing that then all Indians are drunks. That attitude's got to change.

"Provincial Curriculum Should be Priority"

An educator points out that the new school must follow the Alberta provincial program of studies. She does suggest, however, that there should be more native programs for social studies.

> They should be learning more about the history of the reserve; who the past chiefs were, how the reserve came about, or that the treaties exist, what they cover, ... [and native] languages. Native music could fit into language arts classes, along with dancing, folklore and storytelling. . . . It gives [the children] a true sense of identity. . . . [They] must be proud of their reserve. If they know more about themselves, they can't be put down by outsiders.

> Reading, writing and arithmetic is of number one importance ... Native culture ... and religion ... things like that will fall into place. Education is the only way out. Actually doing things in this world. If you want to get ahead in something I think that you have to have an education. Even if you studied culture intensively that's not really going to get you any place although it maybe a part of your life, your people.

Many of the children attending off reserve county schools are classed a "slow learners or have problems in learning". Parents object to this. All children,

> no matter their ability, should take the same academic subjects. Courses like math 16 don't really get you anywhere ... basic life skills [teach you] to budget your money, [but] you could learn those courses anywhere. It's a waste of time.

Culturally Enriched Provincial Curriculum

Other community members envisioned a blend of both 'worlds.' Their view is that the provincial curriculum would be the primary focus for the school curriculum, with the local language and culture infused.

> The curriculum itself won't change at all from the province. Just the inclusion of [the local language] in all aspects of the teachings would make it different. I also want to include our people to be very active members of our education program. We want our elders, maybe, to start off the year, and to close our year. We want them to spent time with our kids. We also want to have the band council involved

> ... Even in curriculum development. Developing books and cataloguing our language for the future of our people here.

A former student made reference to the textbooks that are normally used in the schools.

> Some of the textbooks used in the provincial curriculum are useless. . . . If we take control of our own education we can look at the books that are written to determine what is good for our children. . . . in social, they talk about Europeans and the Greek explorers ... what about the [contributions] of the Indian people? . . . When they study science, the teachers could teach more how the Indian sees nature. . . . Native people are more grounded. . . . [They need to know] the Indian way. . . . They need to know about Indian government too. . . . Religion should be available, but they shouldn't force nobody to take it.

It would have to be done gradually. The easiest way to convey the language and traditions is through stories.

> Including native writings like stories and poems ... that are written by [the local language] people. It would include the [the local] language, and language would be included in the overall program. . . . We want to do it on a gradual basis ... start out with Kindergarten or grade one telling stories ... and then increase the content ... and the complexity.

The knowledge of [the local] language and "the old traditions" among the children "are slowly dying. . . . The old people are dying off, and I think if we don't do something now, and if we don't start teaching these things in the new school, then it will be lost forever."

"...A Complete Program that Prepares Kid's For Life ..."

> We don't want a 'watered down' program. . . . What we want [is] provincial standards and above. We don't want anything that is below [those standards.] I want to make that very clear. I think that a lot of people are under the impression as soon as a ... tribe talks about local control, I think that their version is that we want to 'water it down' so that it will suit the children and sort of force them through the system without having that adequate background. That perception, I think, is out there as soon as a community mentions local control.

Culture is important, but some community members strongly support the notion that the primary focus for the new school's curriculum should be in the preparation of the children to be competitive in the 'world' off of the reserve.

> Schooling, should be able to help the students be successful in the outsider's world. . . . [C]ulture should be included in there but the bottom line is being able to get a job. It's being able to make a transition from here to the outside, and be successful. That's a real problem in some areas, particularly here. Because life here is not in line with the outside. I guess maybe the students have problems in making that transition.

According to one parent, the success of a school system is measured by the ability of its graduates to make the transition to life off of the reserve.

> Success is graduating with a certificate or your papers. What we gotta do is train our people so that they can continue working on the outside. To get trained so that after the training, we can go out and compete with other people for jobs.

> If they are to find employment opportunities, people have to leave the reserve.

> The opportunities aren't there [on the reserve] for one thing. Job opportunities. Opportunities for advancement. Economic opportunities. Because there is really nothing here. . . . If you feel that your child has that talent and potential ... it can be [realized] in the city. . . . If I had another chance I would never ever come back [to the reserve.] I tell my kids ... go to school, get ... [your] education, look for opportunity on the outside. Never work for the reserve. You get stuck there, and you can never get out. . . . As far as I am concerned I am hoping that my kids never come back. . . . The biggest mistake [that he] ever made was getting stuck on the reserve.

This parent is not alone. Community members frequently talked about wanting their kids to get off the reserve.

> It's their choice but I would rather see them go and work on the outside, and be on their own. This reserve is a place for people to retire. . . . But, we always stress, like my husband always stresses, there is nothing here in our community for the children.

Who Should do the Teaching?

> . . . We need to teach the kids morals and values. . . . They need respect for one another ... respect your elders. Respect for one another. Like when I look at the community] hall, it's really damaged, and I say to myself 'where is all that respect that we teach?' Maybe we need parents there. . . . Parents are the greatest teachers for their children. You have to show by example. That's important ... loving ourselves and who we are is also very important. I think that the elders and the parents should be involved in the teaching of respect to the children not the teachers. The teachers will teach some of that but it should come from the parents.

Most respondents tended to favour a mix of "outsider and local" teachers.

> There is a school of thought that Indian students should have Indian teachers. . . . Again, I think it depends on what you want taught to the students. Is it going to be academic or is it going to be culture? I believe if it's going to be culture, it will have to be native teachers; if it's going to be academic, it could be native teachers or non-native teachers. It doesn't make any difference. It should be the ability to perform successfully as a teacher. . . . I think it should be anyone who can teach most effectively and get the most from the students, regardless of [being] native or non-native.

Non native teachers should not be totally excluded, according to this educator, so long as they are the best people for the job. The major criterion for teaching at the new school should be expertise, not race. "It doesn't really matter who is teaching, so long as they are the best."

Almost all are in agreement that when the school opens, it could not, or should not be staffed totally with native teachers.

> The first ten years will be train[ing] our own people. We have to make damn sure that [teachers from the outside] are good people, good qualified people. Not somebody who has been rejected by an adjacent county or anything of that nature. For the first few years its vital that the community have the right kind of people in place. [They] will be non-band members, and they could be black or white. It important that those people are the right kind of people who would be willing to train [our children] who will be coming out of university. . . . So you'd want to have some good qualified experienced people in place at the outset.

It is important to some band members that the school not be staffed with people from the community simply because they are from the community.

> The Band hires people who need a job, or cause they are so 'n so's brother. You hear a lot of grumbling after the fact, like, How did they get hired when they only have grade twelve. Sometimes it just doesn't make sense.

Many feel that the community school should eventually have an all-native staff, preferably, people from the local community.

> They know the families. They'll know what the needs of the children are. . . . We must have more role models on the reserve [for] our children to follow. Like my daughter, she just finished school a couple of years ago and now she is a teacher aide. She enjoys that, and she wants these kids to get some place in life. She went through a lot of things in life, and she can help them because she went through it. . . . The kids look up to her because she's Indian. . . . [But] you can't just push them into it. They have to want to be teachers.
> . . .
>
> It would be a lot better with our own people. I always felt that the only person who might help us solve our problems are our own people. Because they are the only people who understand the problems. I think that has always been our problem.

What Could Go Wrong?

At some point during the various interviews, all informants were asked what their biggest fear was regarding local control. The responses fell into five general categories.

"Results Could be Second Rate"

> My biggest fear is that we might fail to provide that 'Cadillac' education program for the kids.

With all the expectations for success, how could such a thing happen? One source of failure, according to a participant, is the parents.

> A work ethic, attitude and discipline must be instilled at home. These things come from home. . . . We can hire the best teachers but we are not going to be

> successful without the parents. In my opinion, I don't care what other people think, parents are the key.

"Funding may be Inadequate"

Will the funding by the government be adequate, and, possibly even more importantly, what happens when the "... funding will be cut off? . . . When that happens I don't know how we will ever raise enough monies to pay our own way." Long term funding is also a potential problem. "You know that there's no guarantee that the money will be there. Funding is only there from year to year."

"Parents might not send their kids"

If families have moved off of the reserve, it could be very difficult to convince them to send their children to the reserve school.

> It may be difficult get[ting] our students back. There are a lot of parents who are getting educated themselves and going to school, and some of these people would not want to make a move back to the community.

There may be difficulty even if the parents still reside in the community.

> I'll try it for one year. I want to see what they have to offer my child. I want to see if they can meet my child's needs. Is the new school going to meet my child's needs? I don't want my child to struggle. If they go to that school for one year, and I have to transfer him to Edmonton, he might fall behind. I want him to be able to learn about his culture, and at the same time not fall behind academically. Its going to be hard for some parents to move their kids back to the reserve school because the band has to show us what they have to offer our children.

"Interests and education of the children will become secondary over the interests of the bureaucrats"

The children are supposed to be the entire purpose of education, no matter who runs the educational system. It is important that they are not forgotten as central to this entire issue.

My biggest fear would be that people, and by that I mean native politicians, federal politicians, ... bureaucrats and people like that, that they put their own interests ahead of the best interests of the child. To me, the best interests has always been the education of the child. So my biggest fear is that we forget what is at stake. Like most people tend to think about today but they don't think about the future and tomorrow. One of my fears has always been that the native population, not just at Ish-Nish, but in all reserves, is increasing rapidly and we have more and more young people starting school and yet we still have a high drop out rate. We still do not do enough for them. We still do not have enough graduates.

The fact is that the reserves are getting too small. There are not enough jobs on the reserves for all these young people growing up, and they will have to go out and compete on the open market. They will have to compete in the white communities, and they will have to be prepared for that. Unless we start think ahead, and start thinking of the future and what will happen. I think that we are going to raise generations of welfare people. People with welfare mentalities. We must not forget the best interests of the child. That is my biggest fear.

Aboriginal Treaty Rights

Potential "inadequate funding" is tied to the maintenance of treaty rights. "Treaty rights should never stop."

My biggest fear would be what's happening right now where the federal government wants to relinquish itself of it's responsibility and that includes education. It wants to get out of the Indian business and transfer that business over to the province. The province has a gentlemen's respect for the treaty and aboriginal relationship, but it does not bind the province. The province has no legal responsibility to us, but the federal government, through treaties and the Indian Act has ... the legal responsibility to deliver that service. . . . [M]y biggest fear is that they might try and relinquish or dismantle that relationship that they have. That's one reason why this move is on to try and gain support from the international community to have Canada deal with it's legal responsibility and have that entrenched into the constitution where no 'red-neck' politician can come along and say, 'its high time you people start pulling up your socks and paying into the system.'

All we want, is the resources that come from this country of ours. . . . just a small percent of [the resources] of what rightfully belongs to us. . . . A lot of people are under the perception that Indian people don't do a god damn thing. . . . Hell, they can have their tax dollars as long as they give us a share of what's rightfully ours, which is the resources from the ground - things like timber, oil, gas and potash from Saskatchewan.

What Would be the Results of Success?

> To me, to involve everybody - parents, grandparents, the whole community to be directly involved in the education of our children. That's our goal. That's my goal. . . . A lot of people felt useless. . . . Now this won't happen. They will feel that they are needed. If everyone feels the same way, we will become really strong. We will become a community. That's my hope. That's my goal.

Feeling part of the process is crucial. Parents currently do not have that feeling.

> I go to the county school on parent teacher days. I don't feel at home there. I just want to feel a part of my children's education. I feel strangeness. . . . When I try and get involved in those schools it's so hard to get involved. I guess they don't accept us native people. It's just the feeling that I have. It's the feeling that I get. I try because my kids go to school there but maybe it's just me. I really don't know. Your not quite as welcome there. . . . I really find it hard to fit in. [With our own school] ... at least I'd know the parents around here. I feel more at home here because people know who I am. I'd get more involved. . . . I'd go through the changes, I'd be part of the disappointments, and I'd help it grow. [At the county school] ... a band member can sit in on their meetings but cannot vote.

> We have to create a spirit of co-operation among the parents. As long as I am living on this reserve I know that I will participate because I am all for education. Education is a way out for our children; not only academically but in all areas.

To another parent, the best thing to come out of the new school is money. "Money is very important. If the money is not there people will not have jobs. We need the money. Also, the school will have its own curriculum and our children [will be] more at ease."

A community leader described the ultimate success of local control as "self-determination."

> ... [I]f everything goes right ... to be able to self-determine the child's career, future, and therefore the future of the community, the future of the band. The future of the ... people. To know that if you fail, it's your own fault, but if you succeed, you are the person who has done it. So that self-determination factor would be the most exciting thing.

Time is running out. "We need ... our own people in the classroom before our elders disappeared [sic.] I have got so much encouragement from the elderly elders in the past decade. . . . I don't think that that is going to happen because there are only two left now and one is confined to a wheelchair and the other one is just living from day to day." His hope is that the younger elders will "provide that support" for change.

Summary

When one informant was asked to provide a "vision" of what the Ish-Nish Elementary School would be like under local control, he stated,

> I would see our children being very happy to come to school. Being very willing to come to school because it's their school. I would want to see parents come and drop into the school just on an ordinary visit and chat with their teachers or crowd the classroom on parent teacher interview days. I would like to see some of the parents going up there and telling the teachers that, "'eh, my kid is not getting any homework or not pronouncing these words right, or not spelling them right. What's going on? How can I help?" I would like to see that. I would like to see white kids come in and look at our school. I would like to vision the operation of the educational program [on the reserve] on the same basis, if not better, as the county. Maybe I am expecting too much from our community. But I think as a whole we can do it. .., A lot of young people are starting to recognize the value of cultural practices, but at the same time [they are] willing to adapt to the white man's tool to survival - education. I think that would be it. I think that'd be good.

Chapter 5

Reflections, Analysis, and Recommendations

This chapter provides my reflections and analysis of the emergent themes of this study, as well as a summary of the themes. I offer some recommendations to bands considering taking on the control of their schools, and suggestions are made for further study. This chapter closes with the conclusion of this thesis.

Reflections and Analysis of the Emergent Themes

Members of the Ish-Nish band appeared to accept their school, and its inherent problems, as their educational lot. This changed with the 1976 study of the community school. Initial reaction to this education evaluation was that a new school was necessary. Very little occurred, however, until the condemning education report of 1983. This study showed that there were very severe problems in education on the reserve. The Chief and council responded to this report, with a formal statement that changes were mandatory. The problem that they faced was one of "How do we change things if we don't have input into them?" The notion of local control was born.

From the interviews, it would appear that the main thrust at this time was towards the building of the new school. The community felt very strongly that a decent building in which to house the school program was paramount. This is rather interesting. There is no doubt that the community needed a new building, but why was a new building necessary for curriculum development? Community members could, most likely, have received funding for curricular development had they requested it. An entire generation of students

has missed the benefit of such enrichment. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there have still been no major curricular enhancements made, to date.

The study revealed that the first real talk of local control of the education program started in 1983. It became very closely tied with the new school's construction at that time. During the interview process, no one appeared to be able to shed any light on this linkage.

In 1986, formal discussions started with the Department of Indian Affairs. The target date for the assumption of local control was September 1988, according to the Department. The band, however, stated quite clearly that they would not start negotiating until completion of the new school. The school was to open in September 1989, then the estimated completion date was September 1990.

The pushed date of completion could have provided the band more time to prepare itself for takeover, but that did not seem to be what happened. Through whomever's fault, the actual negotiating and final planning stages tended to be very rushed and pressured. Good results do not, frequently, come out of such negotiations.

There are a few reasons why things were left to the last minute. The band was very cautious to commit to local control. As evidenced from the interviews, the band wanted the government to demonstrate the advantages of local control to them. Put even more simply; they wanted some information and support. It would appear that the government did not supply this support. This was a frequently occurring problem; the government promising support and services that never seemed to materialize.

The Reserve School was a poor School

One of the most recurring themes of the study was the community's negative feelings towards the reserve school and its staff. The band involved itself in the interview process for new teachers, so I was curious as to the origin of these negative feelings. Further investigation with the informants led me to the conclusion that what they were really saying is that they did not have quality teachers to choose from. Fact or fiction, this was their impression.

The feeling of most community members was probably best summed up by one informant's "No white people would send their children to our little school" comment. There was only one person whom I interviewed that did not agree with the negative stigma of the reserve school. This person worked at the school. During the interview, the comment was made "... I work hard ... [and] am really bothered ... when people ... come into our school and say, 'Well, can we see what kind of books you use?'; or 'What levels are the kids at?'" (See contextual quotation, page 40.) I could understand the person taking school criticism personally. I could not, however, understand why the educator reacted negatively to what I saw as being interest on the part of parents. That parental interest is, normally, one of the major goals of the teaching staff. Delving further into this subject only revealed the fact that this educator appeared "threatened" by parental inquiry. Possibly feelings such as these are the basis of the community's negative reactions to the old school.

No choice

Another recurrent theme was that the band really had little choice in the matter of whether or not they wanted to run the education program. The federal government was

pressing for devolution, but where was their assistance? Should this important a step be supported only financially? The literature revealed that various bands that had successfully assumed control of their school programs had undergone extensive training in the area of running a school. The Ish-Nish Band did not seem to receive this sort of training. Any programs that the band was involved in, they initiated themselves. I found no evidence of any department initiated assistance, other than financial. It is my personal thought that if the government wants bands to assume this responsibility; they should be providing facilities for training, learning and sharing.

So Much to do; So Little Time

A very prevalent theme that emerged from this study was that the band had an incredible amount of work to do, and "we had better get going." As mentioned in Chapter 4, the band started the process of going local with the passage of the May 1988 BCR. The EDC (Education Development Committee) was formed almost immediately, but they did not meet until November 1988. Six months of potential work was lost forever because they could not get the committee organized. Again, government assistance in getting the EDC established would have been very helpful. It is quite possible that the band might not have thought to request this assistance, nor even have wanted it; but it would have been very beneficial initially.

Because Ish-Nish is such a small community, people that formed the EDC found themselves in the position of "wearing many hats." As the study revealed, the first three permanent members of the EDC also had various duties in the band office. No one person can do it all, and possibly the multiple responsibilities of the core three committee members contributed to the frustration at the committee's progress.

The discussions that the EDC held were good, and their basic approaches to needed accomplishments were sound. Alberta Education provided some guidance, but the federal government did little. The committee worked hard at "gathering the facts" and succeeded. One of their stated goals was to get "everything down on paper" so that it would be ready in advance of the new school opening. This, unfortunately, did not get accomplished. One of the problems could have been that the EDC met only once per month. While the energy was very strong during the meetings, the down time between meetings could have contributed to the perceived apathy of some committee members. It is unfortunate that no one seems to know what actually happened to the EDC. The Task Force's job might have been easier if the EDC had been able to get more of their thoughts and accomplishments on paper.

Local Control = Self Government

All informants equated local control with native people taking care of themselves. They felt, especially in the area of education, that the government was not doing the job well, so they should do it themselves. They live with the results, and therefore, feel that they are more aware of what the problems are than anyone else could be. Nearly everyone had high hopes for cultural enrichment within the school.

Many informants felt that the government might be trying to abdicate their treaty responsibilities. This fear of government abdication is an unfortunate necessity in almost everything that the band does. A great deal of energy which could be constructively used is expended protecting their rights. It is unfortunate because the more time spent battling the system, the less that is available for the important tasks at hand.

Other obligations come with the responsibilities being assumed. The band must be careful to not do unto others as they frequently feel that the government is doing to them. Under local control, the band suddenly acquires an increase in staff numbers. Such things as contracts, and offers of employment must be issued as soon as possible, so that the staff is aware of what is expected of them. If the staff feels appreciated and taken care of, morale is higher.

Local Control = Dignity

Another common theme that came through in this study was that, under local control, the community would be able to regain some of its lost dignity. Educational matters will no longer be "left up to the ... whims of the government." Having the control to plan and implement ideas gives that dignity. The language and culture will not, as a participant put it, "... become extinct."

Local Control = Quality Education

From the community's standpoint, all viewed local control as the means to provide their children with the type of education that children elsewhere receive. Most also endorsed the notion that the students would be more successful with the curricular enhancements that they plan to implement. A concentrated effort is necessary to get curricular development implemented in the community.

With a quality education comes increased interest and involvement. If the children become more involved and interested, so will the parents. There are employment opportunities within the school, so the entire community can share in an increased motivation.

Local Control = A Feeling of Family

The band controlling the new school should eradicate the feelings of alienation frequently expressed by community members. Their children should not face the discrimination that many parents said their children experience in the county schools. They will not have to deal with the "bogus" billing that the county schools were accused of by some parents. With a locally operated community school, if the parents have a concern, they would feel much more willing to get involved to have the situation resolved.

Local Control = Total Native Involvement

Very few indicated that the band was ready to take control of the school. They all seemed, however, to share the view that once the band was ready, there should be no outsiders involved. They want an all native program, from school board, through administrator, to janitors. If there are outsiders involved, then "it isn't us running it." The only area where most study participants felt that there was a place for outsiders was amongst the teaching staff. Even this concession to outsiders would only be temporary, until such time as community members are trained. Some participants demonstrated no objection to other races teaching their children. Their main criteria for hiring a teacher appeared to be that the teachers must be the best available. "If we have the best teachers, then the system can work."

Funding

Funding, as a theme, appeared in almost every interview. In one way or another, everyone participating in this study expressed concern regarding money.

Many community members are afraid that the government will not provide enough money for the school to be successful. Ish-Nish is a small community, and, if the funding if tied totally into population, i.e., formula driven, the new school could suffer.

The Department of Indian Affairs faces financial constraint. Everyone knows this. In the case of Ish-Nish, no one knew what was happening, financially, until the last moment.

At the government's request, the band prepared a budget for the new school's operation, in the spring of 1990. When the final negotiations for takeover started in July 1990, nothing had been said about the budget. It was at this time that the Department announced that the budget was totally unacceptable, and did not follow their funding formula. The government had every intention of funding the new school based on a formula driven schedule; and therefore, the budget had to be totally redone. This was rather surprising to members of the task force, as the Department received the budget almost three months earlier. Suddenly, the task force had to change the budget completely, less that six weeks before the school was scheduled to open.

The deliberations regarding the budget were long and frustrating for all concerned. Different divisions of the Department of Indian Affairs control differing aspects of the budget. It was basically impossible to get all the required divisions of the Department, in the same room, at the same time. For example, the education division would tell the band one thing, and then those responsible for capital costing would turn around at the next meeting and say, "They can't do that. They don't have that authority." The constant overlapping of budgetary concerns caused major difficulties for all involved. Meetings were slated with various people to appear at the same time, so that this problem could be

resolved, but there would always be someone who just "didn't show up." The Department did not appear to have any coordinated policy regarding setting up the budget. The task force frequently received incorrect information from one division that would then have to be changed again, according to another division.

This frustrating process continued for four weeks. The Ish-Nish Chief became more and more frustrated with this state of affairs. Finally, he issued the Department an ultimatum. If things were unresolved by a specific date (approximately one week later), then the Ish-Nish band would withdraw totally from negotiation. The budget received approval, one week later. The next day, the Ish-Nish Chief and Council signed the agreements implementing local control for the community. It was now the last week of August.

This last minute, chaotic approach, employed by the Department, caused other problems. As the school opening was within the week, student desks and other furniture had to be delivered. The desks did arrive, with the furnishing's company demanding payment. The Department had not yet transferred funds to the band. Many complications of this nature arose due to the time constraints.

"... No Politicking."

Many of the study respondents expressed concern regarding potential politicking. As the literature showed, this form of political favoritism has caused problems for other bands when they have assumed control of their schools. The possibility is always there when dealing with such a small community infrastructure.

Ish-Nish is no exception. Conflicts of interest are apparent. The bus owners that provide the transportation to the Ish-Nish students are also members of the band council. One of them did h[illegible]lock local control for his term of office. It was only after this member was n[illegible]the concept of local control was reborn for this community. The simple explana[illegible]r his opposition was that he would lose the money from his bus runs if studen[illegible]did [illegible]o to the county school.

When the task fo[illegible]ted to find out how many students would be attending the new school, other problems with bussing appeared. Two people set out into the community, canvassing door to door, to discover how many parents would be sending their children to the new school. One of the canvassers was returning with very high attendance figures; the other's reports indicated that almost everyone would be going to the county school. These results were rather startling, until another member of the task force remembered that this canvasser was the nephew of one of the bus owners. Once this person was removed from the survey process, the results of subsequent canvassing showed high potential attendance. This sort of interference could be extremely detrimental to the new school.

The task force was charged with the interviewing and hiring of the new teachers and principal. People submitted applications for the various positions that were "connected," in one way or the other, with members of the band council. Some back door pressure was exerted on members of the teacher interview committee (select members of the task force) to have these people hired. Once the committee made it's selections, the chief and council asked for final approval on the hiring. This caused a great deal of tension with the task force. The band council had not had anything to do with the interview process, and therefore did not know anyone who had applied. The final decision was

ultimately left up to the task force, but it provides an example of how politics can cause problems in the issue of assuming local control.

There are checks and balances built into any education system to ensure that operations go smoothly. With the small size of the Ish-Nish community, people wear many hats. This was evidenced with the school bus operations. This compounds with the decision that the Ish-Nish Chief and Council would form the new school board. It is more difficult to function autonomously in such a situation.

"Local Control Gives Us Power"

Possibly the strongest theme to come out of this study was the empowering aspect of local control. All community members expressed this feeling of having control of their destiny via education. They were excited at the concept of being able to create and modify the curriculum. They were enthusiastic about the preservation of their language and culture. Local control seems to be the only way to a better education for their children, and a better education was seen as the only way to a better life.

Summary

The one element that stands out from all of the research is that local control decidedly meant different things to different people.

The perspective that the informants brought to the study flavored their views. Their opinions tended to parallel those of other respondents having the same role in the community.

Employees of the Department of Indian and Inuit Affairs tended to express feelings of fear for their jobs as their primary response to the local control issue. Community leaders responded in terms referring to self government and organization. Parents and community members expressed feelings of hope for the future, and benefits to the community.

There was an important element of uncertainty for **all** informants. No one could speak with confidence as to exactly what will happen under local control. Everyone involved in the study, from government official to former school attender, agreed that local control was an important step for the Ish-Nish Band.

Only one person participating in the study felt that, five months before the band was to take control of the school, it was ready. Most were in agreement that much had to be done to prepare themselves for such an undertaking. What was obvious was the inevitability of local control. With devolution and down-sizing, all informants thought that it was just a matter of time before they would be 'forced' to assume control of the school. There was a sense of urgency in this matter.

In terms of who should be teaching in a community controlled native school, most felt that the most important criterion was that they be qualified for the task. They want their children to receive an education that is at least comparable to anyone else's in Canada. Their hopes and dreams for the next generation are tied to them receiving the educational opportunity to better themselves. They see local control as the means to that end.

Recommendations

People involved in educational takeover can learn a great deal from the experiences uncovered during the Ish-Nish Band's educational takeover process. These recommendations are based on the researcher's personal perceptions, as affected by the study's participants.

One recommendation that I would make to all native communities is that they attempt to get all the assistance possible from the Department of Indian Affairs. There are so many things that the Department could have done that would have provided help for the Ish-Nish Band.

1) The Department is very familiar with school building. They know the chaos created if a school is not finished on time. Their input might have helped to bring the building in on time.

2) The Department knows what inspections must be completed before a school can be opened. If a Department adviser had been more involved, the Band should not have found themselves in the position of being advised, one working day before the school was supposed to open, that the boilers had not received their final inspection.

3) If the Department wants the various bands to construct their own budgets, they should provide information as to the format that they require the budget to take. The constant reworking of the budget was very frustrating for the band, especially when the Department had appeared to have accepted it for some months, in its initial format.

4) A Department adviser could have suggested input into the teacher contracts. In this way, the band would not have been in the position whereby teacher contracts were not ready for signing until three months after the school was open.

5) From the literature, and from personal observation, it would appear that bands which have been the most successful in local control have created a school board which was a totally separate entity from the Chief and council. This provides for an accountability which just cannot be achieved when the school board and the council are one in the same. If something was to go wrong, a structured chain of command makes for easier rectification of situations, before they become major problems.

6) Organization is the key to success. It is important that the band has their planning done as soon as possible. Agreements and budgets should not be completed only days before the school year starts.

7) If department personnel are to work for the band during the takeover negotiation phase (for example, the principal), they should already be band employees. It is very difficult for an administrator to be on the Department's payroll, while working directly in negotiation for the band.

8) It is imperative that negotiations not be allowed to drag out until the last possible moment. The band must insist, via whatever means are appropriate, that arrangements be completed well before the beginning of the school year. Being forced into the position, for example, whereby school desks are being delivered on the first day of school, is intolerable.

It is hoped that, by perusal of the information that this community willingly provided, other ideas and suggestions for success will be gleaned by interested parties.

Recommendations for Further Study

The area of local control of native education is ripe with areas for investigation. One potential area for study would be the observation of how a community utilizes its inherent culture and language to enrich the curriculum. Does the community really become involved in their children's schooling once their community takes over control? This would be another area requiring further study. It would be very interesting to be allowed the opportunity to study a band during its first year of local control, to find out how things proceed. Minor studies have been done if communities are extremely successful, or if they fail miserably, but from the literature, it would appear that nothing has been done, in depth, in this area.

Conclusions

This study has looked at the achievement of local control through the eyes of those involved in the process. From the literature, it was obvious that research indicated that there were problems with native education in Canada. The literature indicated that local control of native education was the best possible solution to this situation.

From this research, Ish-Nish was typical in its educational difficulties. The people expressed concern for their children, and hope for their future through local control. They seek an education for their children that prepares them for life off the reserve, but which

provides them with a sense of their past. In their 1983, Educational Evaluation of the Ish-Nish community, R. & F. Consulting expressed this aspiration well.

The Wolf Ceremony

I wanted to give something of my past to my grandson. So I took him into the woods, to a quiet spot. Seated at my feet he listened as I told him of the powers that were given to each creature. He moved not a muscle as I explained how the woods had always provided us with food, homes, comfort, and religion. He was awed when I related to him how the wolf became our guardian, and when I told him that I would sing the sacred wolf song over him, he was overjoyed.'

In my song I appealed to the wolf to come and preside over us while I would perform the wolf ceremony so the the [sic] bondage between my grandson and the wolf would be lifelong.

I sang. In my voice was the hope that clings to every heartbeat.
I sang. In my words were the powers I inherited from my forefathers.
I sang. In my cupped hands lay a spruce seed -- the link to creation.
I sang. In my eyes sparkled love.
I sang. And the song floated on the sun's rays from tree to tree.

When I had ended, it was as if the whole world listened with us to hear the wolf's reply. We waited a long time but none came.

Again I sang, humbly but as invitingly as I could, until my throat ached and my voice gave out.

All of a sudden I realized why no wolves had heard my sacred song. There were none left!

My heart filled with tears. I could no longer give my grandson faith in the past, our past.

At last I could whisper to him: "It is finished!"

"Can I go home now?" he asked, checking his watch to see if he would still be in time to catch his favorite program on TV.

I watched him disappear and wept in silence.

All IS finished! (p. i)

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APPENDIX A

CORRESPONDENCE

October 7, 1988.

Mr. XXXXX
Chief & Council
Ish-Nish Indian Reserve
Ish-Nish, Alberta
T0E 0N0

Dear Chief and Council:

As you are no doubt aware, I am currently enrolled in the Department of Educational Administration, Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. Part of my program involves an extensive educational study of some dimension. The Ish-Nish Band is on the verge of assuming control of its educational program from the Federal Department of Indian Affairs. I feel that an examination of the processes involved in Band take over of the educational program would have significant merit to all parties concerned. It would also be an invaluable reference to bands who will take this step in the future. I wish, therefore, to have your permission to undertake a study of this nature with the Ish-Nish Band.

The format of the study would involve the development of a case study of the school as it changes hands from the Federal Department to the local Band. Preliminary planning shows that the most effective means to do this would be by dividing the study into two phases. The first phase would involve observation of the 'process' of the Band taking control. The second part would involve observation of the successes of the school as it goes through its first year under local control.

A study of this nature would benefit not only the members of the Ish-Nish Indian Band, but would serve to provide insight for other Indian communities considering control over their own educational programs. The methodology of the study would employ extensive interviews and data gathering at three levels: (1) the community (parents, Band Administrators), the school (students, teachers), and (3) District Office (superintendent).

I appreciate your considering this request, and look forward to hearing from you in the very near future.

Sincerely,

Donald S. Tessier

October 8, 1988

Mr. ZZZZZZZZ
Regional Superintendent of Education
Department of Indian & Inuit Affairs
305, 9942 - 108th Street
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2J5

RE: Proposed Study at the Ish-Nish Reserve

Dear Mr. ZZZZZZZZ:

I am writing to you to secure permission from the Department of Indian and Inuit Affairs to undertake a study concerning Indian control of Indian Education. As you are no doubt aware, local control is being assumed by many Federal reserves in Alberta, and right across Canada for that matter. I would like to develop a case study of one school as it changes hands from the Federal Department to the local band.

Essentially the study would be divided into two phases. The first part of the study involves observation of the process of the Band taking control. The process involved, and how various problems are 'handled' will provide much for the study. The second phase would be observing the 'success' of the school as it goes through its first year under 'local control'.

It is my hope that a study of this nature would provide some insight into the challenges confronted when endeavoring to undertaken such a historic undertaking as this. This would be true, not only for the people of the Ish-Nish Reserve but, perhaps, for other reserves planning to take control of their own educational programs. The Department of Indian Affairs may also find some usefulness for such a project.

The intended methodology will follow a case study approach. Extensive interviews to secure perceptions of the process would be conducted at three levels: (1) Community (band executive, and parents), (2) School (teachers, students, administration), and District Office (Superintendent, Director) Anonymity will be maintained for all involved.

Should the Department see fit to approach this request to undertake this study, I had hoped that some financial support might be available to defer travel, and interview costs (tapes, transcriptions, recorder, etc.). A letter has been sent to the Ish-Nish Band to secure permission from them for such a study.

Thank you for kind attention, and should you have any additional queries in this regard, please advise at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Donald Tessier

June 15, 1989

Dear Chief XXXXX:

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the time you set aside for our recent interview but also for the valuable information you have shared and your spirit of cooperation in this project.

Attached is the transcript of our interview regarding the perceptions of local control of the reserve. I have taken the liberty to correct grammatical errors and to omit incomplete ideas. Interview questions have been printed in bold type.

Please read throught the transcript with the purpose of ensuring that what I have transcribed conveys your intended meaning. Please feel free to clarify any of your responses and, if any other ideas come to mind as you read the transcript, to insert this additional information. You may write directly on the transcript. If there are certain remarks and comments that you would like me to disregard in the data analysis, please feel free to indicate the specific sections.

You may find some of my own questions in the margin. I would appreciate your clarification of these areas.

If it is convenient for you, I'd like to drop by the band office to collect your revised interview transcript on Tuesday, June 20. I hope that this arrangement will be convenient for you.

Once again, I'd like to assure you that you and the reserve will remain anonymous and that all information is being treated confidentially. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me at home (487-8711).

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Donald Tessier

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(1) What does local control mean to you?

(2) Why is local control important? (or not important?) Will local control help them?

(3) Why do you feel that local control will help you and your community?

(4) Do you feel that the band is ready for local control?

Chief & Council and Education Committee Members

(5) Do you plan on working with the Federal authorities or strike out on your own?

(6) Where are you at in this process of 'taking over' control of the educational program from Federal authorities? (i.e. what steps have been taken so far?, what checks and balances have you put in place to ensure that the steps being taken are going to produce the right effects?

(7) To what extent has the band researched and prepared for the advent of local control? (in general terms only)

(8) What specific plans has the band made for local control regarding curriculum?, regarding teachers?, regarding funding?, regarding the administration of local control?

(9) What problems are you experiencing currently with regard to local control?, and what problems do you anticipate in the implementation stages of local control?

(10) What currently is one of your biggest fears you have with regard to assuming control over your own edcuational program?

(11) What is one of the most exciting things that you are looking forward to with regard to local control?

Follow-Up Questions (to people involved in EDC and Task Force):

(1) Tell me when talk of local control, that is the assumption of community control of the school from Federal authorities was first raised? Was there anything that happened in the community that caused that issue to be raised?

(2) When was contact first made with the Department of Indian Affairs with regard to assuming control of the school? Chronologically speaking, talk briefly about subsequent meetings that the band has had with the Department in regard to local control and what was discussed up to the present time?

(3) When was the education committee first formed?

(b) What is the purpose or function this committee?

(c) How was it decided who would be on the committee?

(d) How are decisions arrived at?

(e) What authority does the education committee have to the making of decisions with regard to local control?